DISCOURSES

ON

SELECT PASSAGES

OF THE

SCRIPTURE-HISTORY.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

By JOSEPH JENKINS, A. M.

VOL. II.

——— *Enſamples — for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.* 1 Cor. x. 11.

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CONTENTS

OF THE

SECOND VOLUME.

DISCOURSE XI.

The deſcent of the manna.

EXODUS xvi. 18.

—— *He that gathered much, had nothing over, and he that gathered little, had no lack.* Page 1

DISCOURSE XII.

The grave of concupiſcence.

NUMBERS xi. 33.

And while the fleſh was *yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed; the wrath of the Lord was kindled againſt the people, and the Lord ſmote the people with a very great plague.* 27

DISCOURSE XIII.

The reproof of Balaam's aſs.

NUMBERS xxii. 28.

And the Lord opened the mouth of the aſs, and ſhe ſaid unto Balaam, " *What have* " *I done unto thee, that thou haſt ſmitten* " *me theſe three times?*" —— 55

DISCOURSE XIV.

Samſon's victory with the jaw-bone of an aſs.

JUDGES XV. 15.

And he found a new jaw-bone of an aſs, and put forth his hand and took it, and ſlew a thouſand men therewith. 82

DISCOURSE XV.

Ruth's piety.

RUTH i. 16.

And Ruth ſaid, " *Intreat me not to leave* " *thee,* or *to return from following after* " *thee:*

" *thee: for whither thou goeſt, I will*
" *go; and where thou lodgeſt, I will*
" *lodge: thy people ſhall be my people,*
" *and thy God my God.*" 121

DISCOURSE XVI.

Thou art the man.

2 SAMUEL xii. 7.

And Nathan ſaid unto David, " *Thou*
" art *the man.*" —— 146

DISCOURSE XVII.

The character of Abijah, the ſon of Jeroboam.

1 KINGS xiv. 13.

—— *Becauſe in him there is found* ſome *good thing, toward the Lord God of Iſrael, in the houſe of Jeroboam.* 178

DISCOURSE XVIII.

The contented Shunammite.

2 KINGS iv. 13.

—— *And ſhe anſwered,* " *I dwell among*
" *my own people.*" 208

DIS-

DISCOURSE XIX.

Unbelief exemplified and punished.

2 KINGS vii. 2.

Then a lord on whose hand the king leaned, answered the man of God, and said, "*Behold,* if *the Lord would make win-*
"*dows in heaven, might this thing be?*" *and he said,* "*Behold, thou shalt see*
"it *with thine eyes, but shalt not eat*
"*thereof.*" 236

DISCOURSE XX.

Hazael's self-confidence.

2 KINGS viii. 13.

——— "*But what?* — Is *thy servant*
"*a dog, that he should do this great*
"*thing?*" 259

DISCOURSE XXI.

Isaiah's vision.

In two Parts.

ISAIAH

ISAIAH vi. 1——8.

In the year that king Uzziah died, I ſaw alſo the Lord, ſitting upon a throne high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it ſtood the ſeraphims: each one had ſix wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and ſaid, " *Holy, holy, holy* is *the Lord of hoſts:* " *the whole earth* is *full of his glory.*" *And the poſts of the door moved, at the voice of him that cried, and the houſe was filled with ſmoke. Then ſaid I,* " *Wo* is *me! for I am undone; becauſe* " *I* am *a man of unclean lips, and I* " *dwell in the midſt of a people of un-* " *clean lips; for mine eyes have ſeen* " *the King, the Lord of hoſts.*" *Then flew one of the ſeraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand,* which *he had taken with the tongs from off the altar. And he laid* it *upon my mouth, and ſaid,* " *Lo, this hath touched thy* " *lips; and thine iniquity is taken away,*

" *and*

" *and thy ſin purged.*" *Alſo I heard the voice of the Lord, ſaying,* " *Whom* " *ſhall I ſend, and who will go for us?*" *Then ſaid I,* " *Here* am *I; ſend me.*" 285

ERRATA.

Page 47, line 21, read *thine hand,* &c.
277, l. 19, r. *Let.*
295, l. 14, r. *the.*
311, Note, l. 8, r. *Pierce.*

3 NO 63

DIS-

DISCOURSE XI.

The deſcent of the manna.

EXODUS xvi. 18.

—— *He that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack.*

CAN God furniſh a table in the wilderneſs? were the words which the children of Iſrael ſpake againſt God, when *they limited the holy One of Iſrael.*[a] For the ſake of Abraham, Iſaac and Jacob, the Lord had mercy on this people, and remembered their very diſtreſſed ſtate in Egypt; their ſighing came up unto him, and, on their account, he ſhewed ſigns in Egypt, and wonders in the land of Ham. Laſt of all, he divided the Red ſea, and, with a mighty hand, led them out of the

[a] Pſalm lxxviii. 19, 41.

houſe of bondage. — So aſtoniſhing a miracle excited that momentary joy, that temporary thankfulneſs in their hearts, that *they ſang God's praiſes*; *but they ſoon forgat his works* — murmured againſt his ſervants, Moſes and Aaron — and even wiſhed they had remained in Egypt, or could return thither.

It muſt be confeſſed, their ſituation at this time was very trying. They were in the wilderneſs of Sin, where no ſupply of food could be procured. The proviſions they had brought with them were exhauſted. —— However, the reflections would have been but juſt and proper, that he, who had ſo lately divided the waters for their paſſage through, could eaſily find out the means of their future ſupport; and he, who had performed ſo many ſtupendous works in their favour, would not leave them to periſh for want of bread. But what degree of evidence is proof, againſt the hardneſs and obſtinacy of unbelief? —— Yet God pitied them; and at once to ſhew his power, convince them of his love, and teſtify his reſentment againſt their murmurings, added

added another miracle to thoſe already wrought. He rained down bread from the clouds upon them. The people were commanded to aſſemble in the morning, and mark the divine proceedings. In the morning, accordingly, the camp was ſurrounded with a copious dew, which fell the preceding night, and which, when exhaled by the ſun, left a round ſubſtance, ſmall as the hoar-froſt, and, with a moderate degree of dreſſing, ready for immediate uſe. The quantity was amazing, when conſidered that it was to feed a million of ſouls. Its taſte was agreeable, and, ſome aſſert, accommodated itſelf to the particular palate, of the perſon who eat of it. Indeed, the Bible ſpeaks ſo highly of its excellence, that it denominates it *angels food*;[b] not as if the celeſtial hoſts ſtand in need of that refreſhment, which the daily waſte of our bodies makes neceſſary; nor yet, that the Deity required the miniſtration of angels, in preparing this ſupernatural food; but to denote its ſuperiority to every other kind of aliment. The people were ſo ſurpriſed at

[b] Pſalm lxxviii. 25.

the ſpectacle, that they exclaimed, "*What* "*is this?*" not knowing what it was; and from hence, agreeably to the meaning of the original word, it was called *Manna*. Every family, therefore, had its daily bread ſent to the door of the tent. For five days of the week the people gathered, juſt what was ſufficient for each day's conſumption. On the ſixth morning, double the quantity fell, which was to be the allowance of two days, becauſe upon the ſeventh — the ſabbath-day, there fell none. Amongſt ſo great a multitude of people, ſo remarkably ſtiff-necked alſo, it could hardly be expected, but ſome would diſobey, or vary from, the divine directions. Certain of the people went out to look for the manna on the ſabbath, but were diſappointed. Others, contrary to orders received, avariciouſly reſerved a part of it till the next day; but it putrefied and became offenſive. And whereas in the hurry of gathering each perſon's allotment, before the heat of the ſun melted the manna, miſtakes might be committed, ſome might take up more than was neceſſary, and ſome be found deficient, our text

text adds, that ſo exactly did the Lord proportion the manna, to the mouths of the eaters, that *he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack.*

The amount of the whole is, that every one had enough; and God, to evince he had no greater affection for one than another, as he diſtributed his bounty freely, ſo equally to all. —— Perhaps it will be eſteemed a paradox, if I ſuggeſt that this is a picture of human life; and that, apparently unequal as are the diſtributions of Providence, and confuſed the ſtate of things in this world, the lot of mankind is, notwithſtanding, for the moſt part equally divided — he who hath much hath nothing over, and he who hath little lacketh not. The following conſiderations, at leaſt, will prove the opinion not ſo improbable, as at firſt ſight it may ſeem. — For inſtance,

I. There are perſons, whoſe hiſtory falls in with our text in the ſtricteſt ſenſe. — Led by the hand of Providence, through the wilderneſs of this world, they have

had in general nothing wanting, that was eſſential to their ſupport, and nothing to ſpare. They have toiled for their daily ſubſiſtence, and it was afforded them — but no more. — Living thus from hand to mouth, they have wiſhed to advance themſelves in the world — but it has not pleaſed the Lord to ſucceed their ſchemes. They have riſen up early, ſat up late, and eat the bread of care—but ſtill to no purpoſe. Sometimes a plan has propoſed itſelf to their minds, which appeared promiſing — but either it was defeated by occurrences entirely unforeſeen, or elſe, what they gained in one part, they loſt in another. They ſee others, around their dwellings, come on; every thing they do ſeems proſperous; but they have always found an unhappy clog at their own feet, that would not permit them to get forward.—— And yet, upon the other hand, they cannot but confeſs, that if they were with-held from ſoaring, they were alſo ſuſtained from ſinking. If all has not been granted, which they wiſhed for, neither has all befell them which they feared. They have been

in

in trouble, and carried through it — deprived of ſome of their comforts, and had others ſent in their room. — Some of their reſources dried up, and new ſupplies were opened in their ſtead, by him who cauſeth rivers to flow in dry places, and turneth the barren wilderneſs into a fruitful field. — So that after many difficulties and deliverances, many fears, and a long experience of the conduct of God's providence towards them, theſe perſons are conſtrained to make the acknowledgment, "*Hitherto hath the Lord* "*helped us.*" [c] And, variegated as their lives have been — chequered with diſappointments, mortifications, ſorrow and vexation, their end has abundantly proved, that they have had every thing proper, and of real ſervice, though few things ſuperfluous. And this is frequently the caſe of the moſt humble, the moſt holy, the moſt exemplary and uſeful people, with whoſe preſence the world is favoured. —— And then,

II. The ſame ſentiment may be argued

[c] 1 Samuel vii. 12.

in a more general way. — Reſpecting the real neceſſaries of life, there is not that diſparity, which is generally conceived to be, between one man and another. The rich and poor meet together; the Lord is the maker of them all, and he who made them has ſo diſpoſed of matters, that he has for the moſt part put things abſolutely neceſſary, within the compaſs of the meaneſt, and they are a very few, comparatively, who periſh ſimply for want of the eſſential ſupports of the body. The uncommonneſs of theſe melancholy events, is the reaſon they are rehearſed with ſuch horror, and proves them to be no forcible objection to this doctrine. — 'Tis often ſaid, "The times are hard — ſo hard, that poor "people ſcarcely know how to live." And I will not diſpute that the preſent have burdens, which former times were unacquainted with, though there never was a period, wherein ſuch complaints were not heard. But is it not clear, that a great part of the hardſhips complained of, proceeds not from a real ſcarcity of neceſſaries, but a hankering after ſelf-gratification and perſonal indulgence. If our fore-

fathers

fathers were ſtrangers to our exigencies, they were alſo to our luxuries. One important ſource of the plenty they poſſeſſed was their plainneſs, their prudent œconomy, their averſion to extravagance. In a word, were men to retrench thoſe expences, and deny themſelves thoſe gratifications, which their circumſtances will not admit of — were they to attend to the voice of impartial reaſon, and confine their deſires to the real calls of nature, we ſhould hear fewer complaints of the hardſhips of the times, fewer murmurings againſt providence; and whatever diſpenſable articles might be omitted, of the indiſpenſable there would be no lack. —— Nor ought we to ſuppoſe,

III. Becauſe perſons are ſtationed in an apparently higher rank, and abound in affluence, that they are exceptions to the aſſertion laid down: — 'Tis granted, that a ſmall part, moved by the grace of God, duly improve their wealth to glorify God, and do good in the earth. A few alſo, from the mere impulſe of humanity, ſtrive to make others happy. Diſtreſs and care

flee before them. Their footſteps diffuſe plenty, and they derive thence a moſt refined pleaſure—a joy, which the ſtranger intermeddleth not with. But to ſpeak of by far the greater number, if you put their grandeur in one ſcale, and their enjoyment in the other, perhaps it will be found, that as the former encreaſes, the latter diminiſhes. Let the rich man limit his views to the mere demands of his ſituation, and the better half of his riches will be uſeleſs.—Let him go beyond thoſe demands, and they will become a burden — not a pleaſure, as the manna, avariciouſly hoarded, *bred worms and ſtank.*[d] — This is in ſo many inſtances verified by obſervation, that that ſerenity often takes up its quiet abode in a cottage, which could not reſide in a palace—which ſtole away from the ſtately edifice, preferring the humble cell of poverty, to the lofty, the well-adorned temple of folly and diſſipation. New acquiſitions bring forth new cares, and new ſorrows. — The more riches, the more anxiety, either to ſecure, or to lay them out. — The more exten-

[d] Dr. Gill's Expoſition on 2 Cor. viii. 15.

extenſively acquainted, not the more true friendſhip, but flattery, diſguſt, and the painful experience of human inſincerity. — The more diſtinguiſhed, the fairer mark for envy and ſlander. —— In ſhort, the higher, the more liable to fall and be hurt. — See the man of opulence living to himſelf alone — view him, craving wealth with all the eagerneſs of beggary — or fooliſhly ſuſpending his happineſs upon the ſmiles of one man — or angry at the faithful monitor, who has friendſhip enough to point out to him his faults, and courted by a ſet of worthleſs mercenaries, who extol him to his face, and abuſe him behind his back — or running the round of amuſement, till the charms of amuſement are worn out, and invention is racked to death — or ſunk into debauchery, till debauchery has made his heart ſick, and yet left him unſatisfied — or pampered by luxury, till the ſyſtem of luxury is exhauſted — or drowned in intemperance, till the man is loſt in the ſwine; — view this, I ſay, more than probable caſe, and can you call it enjoyment? —— Turn your eyes from the diſagreeable ſpectacle, and

(excepting ſome piteous objects expoſed to calamity and misfortune; allowing alſo for the victims of intemperance, which, it muſt be admitted, are too often found in lower life) behold the poor man — his ſubſiſtence ſmall — his deſires contracted — and wiſhes few — his diet ſimple — his appetite keen — his reſt ſweet from labour — his body firm and hardy — his health ſound — and though not unacquainted with pain, yet with thoſe diſorders and that liſtleſneſs, which proceed from inactivity and refinement. — He fears no weather. — He dreads no cold. — All ſeaſons are alike to him. — He wears well, and advances to old-age in due time, with its attendant weakneſſes, but not with a body debilitated by irregularity, enervated by indolence, emaciated by diſeaſe, or the ſprings of life choaked by exceſs. — His decay is gradual — his exit comparatively eaſy, perhaps triumphant, in the hopes of immortal glory. — He leaves behind him a ſtrong and numerous race, the inheritors of their father's robuſt conſtitution, and imitators of the manners whereby he confirmed it. — Let me aſk, whether

whether the health of the laborious poor is not to him, greater riches than the treaſures of the Indies? — Whether the ſervant is not often happier than his lord? — And his enjoyment of his ſcanty pittance more ſubſtantial, than that of profuſion and extravagance? —— To which may be added,

IV. Another conſideration. — Death will, at length, ſet all ranks of men upon a level. — *Naked came* we *out of our mother's womb, and naked ſhall we return thither; the Lord gave, and the Lord* will *take away.*[c] — A ſtriking emblem of this expectation, is afforded us every evening of our lives. No man can call his poſſeſſions his own, for twenty-four hours ſucceſſively. Diſmiſſing the buſineſs, and diveſted of the pride of life, he muſt undreſs himſelf for the night, and retire to ſleep. This is an imperfection incident to our frame, which the mightieſt monarch, the lord of the moſt extenſive eſtate, muſt neceſſarily ſubmit to. Sleep conquered him who conquered the world. It

[c] Job i. 21.

It puts the maſter and ſlave upon a level. And, when aſleep, the difference is immaterial, between the bed of down and that of chaff, the coſtly furniture of the rich and the coarſe couch of the poor, except that the ſleep of the latter is, perhaps, more ſound and refreſhing.—In like manner it is certain, that as "we brought "nothing with us into this world, ſo at "death we can carry nothing out." The lands and tenements muſt be left to heirs and ſucceſſors — glittering ornaments exchanged for the ſhroud, the coffin, and the grave. — Beloved or reſpected, honoured or flattered, what doth it all now avail? *All fleſh ſhall periſh together, and man ſhall turn again unto duſt.*[f] — In the grave, *the wicked ceaſe from troubling, and there the weary be at reſt.* — There *the priſoners reſt together, they hear not the voice of the oppreſſor.* — *The ſmall and great are there, and the ſervant* is *free from his maſter.*[g] — *They ſhall lie down alike in the duſt, the worms ſhall cover them*;[h] and forever as the ſoul will exiſt, it will never return

[f] Job xxxiv. 15. [g] Job iii. 17, 18, 19.
[h] Job xxi. 26.

return to its former employments, its cares or pleaſures; but enter upon a new ſtate, where ranks, titles, preferments, emoluments and ſubordinations will have no place, but the only diſtinction be, that of happineſs in the preſence of the Lord, or miſery in the company of infernal ſpirits — an happineſs ſecured to the meaneſt ſaint, by the everlaſting love of God — a miſery the haughtieſt ſinner muſt endure, without any reſpect for his former ſplendour.

Give theſe reaſons their due force, and there will not appear that inequality, which a ſelfiſh or ſuperficial obſerver may think to be, in the lot of mankind. On the contrary, God hath ſo diſtributed his bounty to each, that *he who gathereth much hath nothing over, and he who gathereth little hath no lack.* Nor is this a thought unworthy of the ſerious meditation, of perſons in every rank of life. It conveys inſtruction proper for every ſtation.

1. It teaches the rich, not to deſpiſe thoſe who are apparently beneath them. — What you have received, you are indebted for to God. — Deſcended from anceſtors,

ceſtors, whoſe induſtry turned the ſtreams of wealth into your family, what previous merit rendered you the heir of their labours?—Or is your fortune the fruit of your own diligence? Still it was God who ſucceeded your endeavours, and commanded that proſperity to crown your ſchemes, which he denied to others. And his ſovereign will might have made, and may yet make you to exchange ſituations with the poor and indigent.—Do you imagine your opulence an evidence of your greater intereſt in the notice of heaven? By this reaſoning the moſt worthleſs would be conſtituted its favourites. Does it argue God's peculiar regard for you, that he has given you the loweſt of his bleſſings; or your ſuperiour happineſs, to have more than you can diſpoſe of with pleaſure, unleſs you make others ſharers with yourſelf? If you uſe God's mercies without abuſing them, you will receive them with humility and thankfulneſs, feed on them with moderation, and, as the ſteward of his bounty, deal out the overplus to the hungry and neceſſitous, condeſcending to men of low eſtate. But if ye deſpiſe the poor,

poor, and with-hold more than is meet, *your riches will corrupt, your garments* become *moth-eaten, your gold and ſilver cankered, and the ruſt of them ſhall be a witneſs againſt you, and ſhall eat your fleſh as it were with fire.*[i] — But *you commune with your own heart and ſay,* " *I am come to* " *great eſtate,*[k] and the good things of " the world are at my command."—Open your arms wide then —— graſp thoſe objects which you call deſirable, and your perſonal experience will teach you, what the preacher in vain has dictated, that the more frequent your indulgence of temporal gratifications, the ſooner you will ſicken of them, and feel the mortifying conviction, that *all is vanity and vexation of ſpirit, and there is no profit under the ſun.*[l] — But you have money, and the poor bow down to you; and from the uniformity of this ſuppoſed tribute of reſpect paid you (more frequently proceeding from the cringing ſelfiſhneſs of the deſigning) you are ready to think yourſelf entitled to adoration.——*I ſaid, ye are gods,*

[i] James v. 2, 3. [k] Eccleſ. i. 16.
[l] Eccleſ. ii. 11.

gods, but ye ſhall die like men.[m] In a few years, they who bow down to you will tread upon you; nor will the worm be more complaiſant to your corpſe, than to that of the hard-working mechanic. How ridiculous a corruption is pride! How forgetful is that mortal, of the many circumſtances of degradation awaiting him, who aſſumes airs of importance from the ſhadowy greatneſs of this world, and eyes with contempt the man of plainneſs and humility, as if he were produced out of another mould! Unſeemly and unbecoming more eſpecially, when the pride of life leavens the church of Chriſt, and in that ſchool, where the rich brother is taught to rejoice that he is *made low*, in the temper of his mind, and to remember, that *as the flower of the graſs he ſhall paſs away*,[n] the brother of low degree is trampled upon, as an inferiour and almoſt unneceſſary member, though God has endowed him with that principle which claims affinity with himſelf, and will exalt him above the pageantry and tinſel of the world, to the dazzling and ſubſtantial glory

[m] Pſalm lxxxii. 6. [n] James i. 10.

glory of heaven. — There is more contained, than is uſually apprehended, in thoſe words of our bleſſed Saviour, *Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye ſhall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*° The only laudable ambition in the family of Chriſt is this, — which ſhall diſtinguiſh himſelf moſt for the honour of God — which ſhall demean himſelf moſt lowly to his chriſtian brethren; eſteeming others better than himſelf, and by bearing their burdens, fulfil the law, and copy the example, of his divine Redeemer? —— It is a proper inference, alſo, in the

2. Place, that the aforegoing reflections ſuggeſt contentment to thoſe, whoſe affairs are more circumſcribed than the perſons juſt mentioned. —— Narrow as have been the means of your ſubſiſtence, you never felt total want. — Though ſtraitened you have always had enough — not only more than you deſerved, but more than was abſolutely neceſſary. What ſuperiour good, then, would ſuperabundance do you? — But " you wiſh to be independent, and " have

° Mat. xviii. 3.

" have ſomething more than the ſupply " of your daily wants." What aſſurance have you, that this would not be detrimental to your beſt intereſts? Might you not forget God the giver, if you did not diſcern his interpoſition in your daily ſubſiſtence? —— Perhaps you wiſh for opulence, from the fond preſumption that, thus enabled, " you would do much good " in the world and the church." —— Pleaſing deluſion! Many have entertained it before you, whoſe future proſperity proved a ſnare to them, attached them more forcibly to the earth, and contracted, inſtead of dilating, their deſires of public uſefulneſs. God knows your frame; he remembers you are but duſt; and, it may be, leaves your wiſhes ungratified, becauſe he ſees you to be unprepared for the trial, and that your preſent ſtate is that, in which you will beſt glorify him. —— But you fear, that " being always " in difficulty, and often near the verge " of ruin, ſome unhappy event will take " place, irrecoverably to undo you." — Is that deducible, however, from the care which God has hitherto taken of you? Is

Is not the contrary implied — that he will ſtill preſerve you? The ſcripture is at leaſt explicit, that to them who are poſſeſſed of the power of vital religion, and give evidence thereof, by *ſeeking the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs, all other* needful *things ſhall be added*;[p] *for their heavenly Father knoweth that they need all theſe things.* If God attends ſo minutely to the graſs of the field, to the ſparrows and the ravens, much more does he to thoſe who love and fear his name. *Truſt in the Lord, and do good,* then, *and verily thou ſhalt be fed. Commit thy way unto the Lord, and he ſhall bring it to paſs. Reſt in the Lord, and wait patiently for him; fret not thyſelf becauſe of him who proſpereth in his way: For yet a little while and the wicked* ſhall *not* be; *yea, thou ſhalt diligently conſider his place and it* ſhall *not* be. *But the meek ſhall inherit the earth, and ſhall delight themſelves in the abundance of peace.*[q] —— This leads me, therefore, for the better enforcement of the preceding directions, to add another obſervation,

3. On

[p] Mat. vi. 26—33. [q] Pſalm xxxvii. 3, 5, 7, 11.

3. On the uſefulneſs of faith in the Lord Jeſus Chriſt. — Our Lord himſelf teaches the propriety of this conſideration, by drawing a parallel between his own mediatorſhip, and the deſcent of the manna in the wilderneſs; ſignifying that, as the manna was rained from the clouds, and ſo might, in an accommodated ſenſe, be ſtiled *bread from heaven*, he, in the ſtricteſt ſenſe, *came down from heaven.*[r] — As the manna was given to Iſrael, when in circumſtances very diſtreſſing, ſo he came down for our relief, in the higheſt poſſible diſtreſs, — the danger of periſhing for ever. — As, when proviſions could not be procured for money, the manna was ſent to Iſrael freely, ſo, at the time it was moſt clearly proved, that the united efforts of mankind were unable to purchaſe the goſpel ſalvation, Jeſus came to beſtow the bleſſing *without money and without price*[s] — as the manna was ſufficient to feed all the nation of Iſrael, ſo there is a fulneſs in Chriſt, for all the wants of the people of God —— as the manna followed the Iſraelites through the wilderneſs, ſo Jeſus ſupplies

[r] John vi. 31, &c. [s] Iſaiah lv. 1.

ſupplies his people, in all their pilgrimage through this world.——In each of theſe particulars, the analogy holds ſtrictly. In two points there is ſome variation, yet to the advantage of the chriſtian ſalvation. One is, that though the Iſraelites eat manna they died, and, notwithſtanding this food, might have periſhed for ever; whereas Jeſus is *the bread of life*, which if a man eat (that is, on whom if a man believe) though his body muſt ſubmit to death, his ſoul ſhall never die, and his body ſhall be raiſed up again at the laſt day.——The other difference is, that the manna ceaſed upon the entrance of Iſrael into Canaan; but Jeſus lives in the heavenly Canaan, to be the everlaſting admiration and triumph of his people, whom he brings to glory.——Now, as believing on the Son of God is deſcribed by eating him, the *ſpiritual bread*, let us aſk, What is meant thereby? and, What are the effects of thus eating him?——To eat the bread of life, ſuppoſes a ſteadfaſt conviction of the truth of what Chriſt has delivered —an hearty application to, and reception of him, as the precious and ſuitable Saviour

viour our circumſtances require — a believing meditation on him, as the life of our ſouls, through whom alone we receive pardon — from whom we derive comfort, direction, and grace — without whom we can do nothing — but aided by whom, the author and finiſher of faith, there is no difficulty which we may not overcome. — The very obvious effects of the exerciſe of ſuch a frame as this are, that the rich man will not value himſelf upon his temporal acquiſitions, aware that the world is but a dream, the trueſt riches are the things which are above, and the poor of this world may be, equally with himſelf, *the choſen of God, rich in faith, and heirs of* that *kingdom, which God hath promiſed to them that love him.*[t] —— On the other hand, the poor man, who lives by faith on Chriſt, is taught thereby to be ſatisfied with the portion divine providence has allowed him, content with a little, living above the earth, reſigned to God's will in trouble, and delighted with the aſſurance, that if the world forſakes, and creature comforts fail, his *life*, his immortal

[t] James ii. 5.

mortal intereſt is ſecure, being *hid with Chriſt in God.* [u] —— And, to conclude, the tendency of this frame, is to refine and ſpiritualize the ſoul, inſpire it with that peace, thoſe delightful foretaſtes of the pleaſures for evermore, which the world can make no addition to, and from which *the world cannot take away*, expand its longings after the fruition of infinite excellence, excite it to every good word and work, and thus cheriſh, and render more and more vigorous, that holy principle within it, of celeſtial origin, which *ſprings up into everlaſting life.* [w] —— Hail then ye children of light — *partakers of the divine nature* [x] — heirs of eternal felicity — *waſhed from your ſins in the blood* of the Lamb, and *made kings and prieſts unto God and his Father!* [y] Every thing beneath your enjoyments is as droſs to gold — as chaff to the wheat — as a bubble which burſts upon the ſlighteſt touch — as a meteor, which glares upon the eye of ſenſe, and leads in the falſe purſuit of pleaſure, through the darkneſs

[u] Col. iii. 2.
[w] John iv. 13.
[x] 2 Pet. i. 4.
[y] Rev. i. 5, 6.

of this world, to the perpetual horror of the next. 'Tis your peculiar privilege to *eat of the hidden manna*,[z] and drink out of *the fountain of living waters*[a] — to walk in the highway of ſalvation, till you arrive at the paradiſe of God. — Let the world love its own, and the ſeed of the ſerpent covet the ſerpent's food. May my dwelling be with the people of God, and my ſoul united to them! May my death be the death of the righteous, and my latter end be like his! Amen!

[z] Rev. ii. 17. [a] Jer. ii. 13.

HYMN.

I.

WE bleſs the Lord, the juſt the good,
Who fills our hearts with joy and food:
Who pours his bleſſings from the ſkies,
And loads our days with rich ſupplies.

II.

He makes the ſaint and ſinner prove
The common bleſſings of his love.
But the wide diff'rence that remains,
Is endleſs joy, or endleſs pains.

DIS-

DISCOURSE XII.

The grave of concupiſcence.

NUMBERS xi. 33.

And while the fleſh was *yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed; the wrath of the Lord was kindled againſt the people, and the Lord ſmote the people with a very great plague.*

THE duty of unreſerved acquieſcence, in the determinations of God concerning us, and ſatisfaction with the ſtation in which he has placed us, may be argued from the reaſonableneſs of the thing, conſidering the majeſty of the Moſt High, and the low rank we hold in the ſcale of being — conſidering the wiſdom of God, and the relation we ſtand in to him, as creatures whom he formed for his own honour, and placed in that particular

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ſphere, for which, of all others, our talents are beſt calculated, and where we have the faireſt and beſt-adapted opportunities, of ſhewing forth his praiſe. —— The ſame duty may be argued, alſo, from the impoſſibility of ſucceeding in our views, without the divine concurrence — an impoſſibility our Saviour finely deſcribes, by comparing it with that of *adding, by taking thought, one cubit unto our ſtature.*[b] — The ſentiment will receive additional ſtrength, by a recollection of the equality of mankind, and the advantages of a pious ſubmiſſion to divine Providence — its advantages to the man himſelf, by promoting peace, reſt and quietneſs, in his own ſpirit. — And the two laſt arguments having been illuſtrated in the preceding diſcourſe, together with the principles from whence this ſubmiſſion flows, my deſign here is, to point out the miſchief of the contrary diſpoſition, by expatiating on the danger of the accompliſhment of unreaſonable deſires, and of coveting thoſe things, Providence has not thought fit, of its own accord, to beſtow.

[b] Mat. vi. 27.

ſtow. — Exceedingly appoſite to the ſubject are the words of my text, which conclude an affecting hiſtory of the rebellion and puniſhment of part of the children of Iſrael; I mean one inſtance, for it is not the only one; they are, alas! numerous; and ſo numerous, as to raiſe our admiration of the forbearance of God, and his regard to his covenant and promiſes, that he did not utterly overthrow this people. — Scarcely were they delivered out of Egypt — ſcarcely were the words of their ſong out of their mouths, but they murmured againſt the Lord; yea, they tempted God, and ſaid, "*Can God furniſh "a table in the wilderneſs?*" [c] — In compaſſion to them, he demonſtrated that he could; he rained down manna from the clouds, and the novelty of the ſupply excited their wonder and gratitude. But theſe emotions ſoon wore off their minds. The manna became common, the people grew tired of it, and, induced by the evil communications of the mixt multitude, which the proſpect of gain had drawn with them out of Egypt, *they fell a luſting*;

[c] Pſalm lxxviii. 19.

ing; and ſufficient as they had of food for the demands of hunger, they even *wept* for more, and ſaid, *Who ſhall give us fleſh to eat? We remember the fiſh* which *we did eat in Egypt freely, the cucumbers and the melons, the leeks and the onions, and the garlick.* They remembered the delights, but not the oppreſſions of Egypt. *But now our ſoul is dried away*, they add, there is *nothing at all beſides this manna, before our eyes*; (for it muſt be obſerved, that the quails mentioned to have been afforded on a former occaſion,[d] ſeem not to have laſted until now.) — The wickedneſs of theſe complaints againſt God, and the crime of diſreſpect ſhewn to the manna, Moſes enhances by a deſcription of the delicious and wholeſome quality of the latter; from whence he leads us to the very deſerved puniſhment of the offenders. — But in what way were they puniſhed? — By denying them their requeſt? — No. — By granting it. — Quails were brought up from the ſea — the number of theſe fowls was ſo great, that they formed a circle of a day's journey around the camp of

[d] Exodus xvi. 13.

of Iſrael — the people gathered for two days and the intervening night, in ſuch abundance, that the leaſt quantity collected contained ten aſs-loads — they ſpread them about the camp, to dry by the heat of the ſun — the people devoured them with greedineſs, delighted with the repaſt, but not admiring the hand which procured it — yea, ſo eager was their attention to their appetites, that they perceived not the vengeance which hung over them; *but while the fleſh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed; the wrath of the Lord was kindled againſt* them, *and he ſmote* them *with a very great plague*; and the reſt of the people were ſo terrified with this unexpected ſtroke, that they could bear the place no longer, but called it *Kibroth-hattaavah*, (that is, *the grave of concupiſcence)* and, probably leaving the remainder of their feaſt behind them in their panic, they *departed unto Hazeroth.*

Of what nature this plague was we are not informed. Some authors are of opinion, therefore, that they eat ſo much, that their own gluttony in the due courſe of things, brought upon them a ſurfeit,

with its conſequent diſorders; and God is no otherwiſe to be regarded in the calamity, than as, by his general providence, ſuffering effects to follow their cauſes. — No doubt the effects of immoderate eating have, in many inſtances, proved fatal; at the time that, in the preſent caſe, more ſeems inferible from the expreſſion of the Lord's *ſmiting* this people with *a plague*; and our text is poſitive, that *while the fleſh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed*, — before they could have proceeded, therefore, to the degree of exceſs ſpoken of, the judgment fell upon them. — Yet, as this example is, beyond diſpute, left on record to admoniſh us, " that if perſons " are not ſatisfied with what God allots " them — if they luſt after things, which " the Lord has not thought proper to " poſſeſs them of, he may give them " what their hearts deſire, and make it " a laſting token of his diſpleaſure, and " conviction of the evil of murmuring " againſt him," it is admitted, that we need not have conſtant recourſe to miracles to prove this truth. Common experience

rience will alſo verify it. For the deſigns of God's government being, in every age, the ſame, whether he works immediately by a miracle, or more ſecretly by the operation of natural cauſes, the iſſue will diſcover his over-ruling agency to have taken place in all human tranſactions. Theſe things conſidered, there will appear a propriety in prefixing this ſtory to a diſcourſe, on the bad tendency of the gratification of intemperate wiſhes; as a warning againſt which, I obſerve,

I. That we are, in a great meaſure, ignorant of ourſelves, and of what is really for our good: conſequently, we may haſtily conclude that to be a benefit, which, if obtained, will hurt us. — We pity the ambition of children, to poſſeſs a knife which would cut them — to ride on horſe-back, from whence they might fall and be killed. The prudent parent thinks it his duty, to divert the child from ſuch improper requeſts, or deny them however importunately urged. And it is well for us, that God puts a negative upon many of our requeſts, the ob-

tainment of which would do us unſpeakable miſchief. — Creatures of yeſterday, we are little better than children in knowledge, and often has the irregularity of our minds ſet us upon ſeeking gratifications, which, if indulged with, muſt neceſſarily have been injurious to us. Two of our Lord's diſciples, we read, preſented a certain petition to him, and, in the proſpect of greater ſucceſs, employed their mother as their advocate; but they met with a meek repulſe in theſe words, *Ye know not what ye aſk.*[c] We are apt to wiſh for this or that object, which we credulouſly believe will be for our comfort. — Who can ſay, that it might not be a croſs? — Mankind have an unhappy propenſity, to look to the bright ſide of a queſtion, and forget there is a dark ſide alſo. Hence perſons have thought, that connections and relationſhips in a particular way (that is, the way to which their own inclinations leaned) muſt undoubtedly be right, and for their advantage; — but God has refuſed his conſent; — the refuſal was felt as an hardſhip;

[c] Mat. xx. 22.

ſhip ; — but who will take upon him to promiſe, that the connections propoſed would have produced the happineſs, ſo fondly expected from them ? It may be, alſo, the denial was given, becauſe God had ſomething better in ſtore. [f] — Or where he has granted theſe requeſts, he has convinced the diſcontented, that a rejection would have been better than a compliance. People have wiſhed for riches, becauſe inſenſible of the care and anxiety ariſing from them. They have wiſhed for lands and tenements, without adverting to thoſe many circumſtances, which may make them a burden inſtead of a pleaſure, the diſtraction, not the repoſe of the ſoul. —— That thing may be a good in itſelf, and prove ſo to others, which might not benefit us, becauſe an unſuitable good ;

[f] " I don't know that I ever met with any " diſappointment, ſince I was a Chriſtian, but it " pleaſed God to diſcover to me, that it was " plainly for my advantage, by beſtowing ſome- " thing better upon me afterwards." — So ſaid Colonel Gardiner, upon being diſappointed of a regiment of foot he expected, inſtead of which he was unexpectedly promoted to be Colonel of a regiment of dragoons.

and, therefore, they who have the largeſt experience, and acquired the greateſt knowledge of themſelves and of the world, freely confeſs their ignorance of what is or is not for their welfare, and that God, whoſe broad eye ſurveys all conſequences — who beholds our frame, and ſees in what manner every ſtate of life would affect us — he, alone, is a competent judge, of what is proper to be given to us, and what with-holden from us. —— I obſerve, alſo,

II. That the matter of our deſires may be in itſelf beneficial, and yet, through our own perverſeneſs, the means of drawing us into a way, eventually detrimental. —— Will any man be confident, that if God grants this or that which his heart is bent upon, it ſhall not prove as oil to the flame within him, cauſe it to burn the fiercer, and blaze to a greater extent? —— A man is of opinion, for inſtance, that if he could call his own a certain ſpecified ſum of money, it would give him contentment. —— Well. He gets it. — Is he contented? — Perhaps not,

not. — It ſeldom happens that he is. — Oftener, by attaining to what he wiſhed for, he mounts upon a riſing ground, ſees further, and deſires more —— his ſchemes for obtaining wealth encreaſe — and how frequently have perſons (led on by the deceitfulneſs of riches, and the hopes of future independence) advanced from ſtep to ſtep, till their airy projects burſt, and great was the report thereof! Their affairs entangled, their capital ſunk, the concluſion was bankruptcy, or worſe; and the pain of their fall taught them, that it had been wiſer to have remained in an humble ſtation, than climbed the pinnacle of fortune to be daſhed down again. —— This reaſoning will hold good, whatever is the ſpecies of enjoyment too warmly regarded. The young heir contemplates his future pleaſures, with all the eagerneſs of anticipation. Though as yet a minor, and under reſtraint, he continually ruminates in his mind the grandeur and reſpect, the amuſements and delights, which a few years will make his. Well. — He comes to age, and his extravagance is unbounded — the tavern, the

the brothel, the gaming-table, and the horſe-courſe are the witneſſes of his folly — unthinkingly he hurries through the circle of riotous living, till a worn-out conſtitution, a waſted eſtate, the neglect of his companions, and contempt of the world, force into him the conviction, that his riches were, through the corrupt bent of his mind, a correction, not a benefit — perhaps drive him to deſpair, and put a ſpeedy end to his life. — What an heart full of anguiſh did the prodigal feel, when, after waſting his ſubſtance, he was *ſent into the fields to feed ſwine* — when, the ſad contraſt of his former luxury, *he would fain have filled his belly, with the huſks that the ſwine did eat* — when he fainted with hunger, *and* ſo little was he eſteemed, that *no man gave unto him* — when, in the anguiſh of his ſoul he exclaimed, *How many hired ſervants of my father's have bread enough and to ſpare, and I periſh with hunger.*[g] "Fool that I "was to leave ſo indulgent a parent! "I now remember the indifference, with "which I beheld his tears at parting. "The

[g] Luke xv. 17.

" The meaneſt ſervant of his houſehold " is infinitely happier than I am. — O " that I had been always under reſtraint, " rather than thus the prey of miſery! " But confident of my perſonal abilities, " I wanted to be my own maſter; inſtead " of which, I was the ſquanderer of my " portion, and am now a periſhing out- " caſt in a foreign country! Whilſt my " deceivers (*friends*, as they called them- " ſelves,) are dividing the ſpoils, and " feaſting on that, by which I ſhould be " kept from ſtarving." —— Dare we undertake for ourſelves, that if we had all our fancy repreſents as eligible for us, we ſhould not too cloſely imitate this youth, and the end of our career be the ſame? — We know not what manner of ſpirit we are of — we know not how many hidden ſprings of action there are within us, which if touched will bear down our beſt-fortified reſolutions — nor whether, if we could reach what we are undutifully aſpiring after, it might not be given as a ſnare to us. —— I add,

III. Another reaſon, againſt the anxious purſuit

purſuit of this world's proſperity, that God may ſuffer it to be obtained, and, at the ſame time, ſend leanneſs into the ſoul. —— And ſhould this happen, the greateſt outward ſucceſs will not balance the ſpiritual loſs. — Let me addreſs myſelf to you who have taſted that the Lord is gracious, and who yet, through the unmortified influence of the old man within you, are apt to wiſh for enjoyments which God has ſeen fit to withhold; let me aſk, How do you know, whether what you hanker after, will not lay fetters upon you, and draw away your hearts from the Lord — at leaſt, chill your deſires of the chief good — weaken the lively exerciſe of religion in your ſouls — cauſe you to become formal, languid, worldly, and the conſolations of God to be ſmall with you? — If encreaſing temporal acquiſitions have a tendency to dry up our ſpiritual moiſture, and ſteal from us the ſweetneſs of divine things, we had better be without them however pleaſing. — If while we ſleep on the enchanted ground, the tares of pride, ſelf-conceit, conformity to prevailing cuſtoms,

toms, indiſpoſedneſs for cloſe walking with God, indifference to duty, and a neglect of our ſtations in the church of Chriſt, are ſown in our ſouls, we may ſafely pronounce, "An enemy hath done this." — Whatever contributes to put us off our guard, and render us leſs vigilant againſt the ſnares of the world, the ſeducements of the fleſh, or Satan the roaring lion, it is a Delilah, a treacherous harlot, in league with our adverſaries — it aims at waſting our ſtrength, and deſtroying our ſpiritual defence — though it ſmiles, its acquaintance muſt be pernicious, and will certainly be felt bitterly — God will be diſhonoured — our own ſouls injured — and, therefore, it is not to be coveted. —— Let me, further, aſk thoſe who have experienced a ſenſe of divine love, What if your heavenly Father, while he grants you earthly good, deprives you of the comforts of his Holy Spirit? — What if he hide his face from you, you go mourning in the bitterneſs of your ſouls, and ſeek him whom you love, but find him not? — Is not the pooreſt, the meaneſt, the moſt deſpicable

ſituation

ſituation in life, with the preſence of a gracious God, preferable to all the world without it? —— Where then your gain, if you obtain what you are ſo earneſt about, at the expence of that which is abundantly more precious, the joys of God's ſalvation? And if you are reſolved to plan your own ſituation, may not this be the effect of ſo undutiful a temper? —— Or,

IV. If men are determined to be their own carvers, the Lord may grant their requeſt, but ſend affliction along with it. —Thus he plagued Iſrael; *while the meat was yet in their mouths; his wrath came upon them, and he ſlew the fatteſt of them,*[h] that is, thoſe who were moſt luxurious and wanton. — The ſprings of life, and the diſpoſal of pleaſure and pain are the Lord's; and as theſe irregular deſires plainly ſuppoſe that happineſs to be in the creature, which reſides only in the Creator who is bleſſed for ever (and of courſe pay that homage to earthly things, which is due to the moſt High alone) he may ſo embitter

[h] Pſalm lxxviii. 30, 31.

embitter the gratification to us, that the agreeable ingredients will hardly be perceivable. The vaſt plenty of quails did thoſe of Iſrael no good, who were ſeized by the plague. — Abundance of wealth will yield but a ſmall degree of ſatisfaction, to a man who groans in a pained body. — To have an eſtate bequeathed us, and the valuable partner, with whom we wiſhed to enjoy it, removed; or a table well furniſhed, and a ſtomach that loathes dainty meat—yea more (a common caſe) to become affluent and not have an heart to uſe it, and take pleaſure in doing good with it,—or after the fortune is acquired, to ſit down in the ſtate of a man who has left off his trade, and knows not how to paſs away his time—he is unhappy for want of employment — fretful, languid, and in the vapours, through mere idleneſs, and becauſe he cannot tell how to diſpoſe of himſelf — theſe and ſuch like diſorders caſt a damp upon the gain of the world — ſome of them are a puniſhment, naturally attendant upon unſanctified riches; they prove them not to be enviable; and that a ſtinted

ſtinted portion, a very morſel, in peace, is a greater bleſſing than ample revenues, with which cares, anxieties, and diſtreſſes are intermingled.——And,

V. One conſideration remains, more alarming than all the foregoing.—It muſt be in judgement that the wiſhes of the wicked man are complied with, if the compliance ripens him for eternal miſery.—A ſinner cannot have a heavier curſe inflicted on him in this world, than to be left to himſelf—ſuffered to go on uninterruptedly, in the error of his way. We will ſuppoſe, that he meets with few or no changes—ſucceſs is retained in his ſervice—his mountain ſtands ſtrong, and ſeems next to immoveable—his wealth grows with his years—and his heart is hardened againſt the fear of the Lord—he ſets his mouth againſt heaven, and ſays, "Who is Lord over me?"——he deſpiſes religion, and ſits in the ſeat of the ſcorner—every additional influx of gain confirms him the ſtronger in impiety, and the children of folly proclaim the proud man happy—but death ſuddenly

ly mows down the ſinner, and ah! where is he?—Or if his diſſolution is not more ſpeedy, old age at length ſteals on, unperceived becauſe diſregarded,—the king of terrors finds the hoary-headed ſinner, unſuſpicious of his approach and unprepared for the event. "Thou haſt bur-"dened the earth too long," he ſays, and hews down the cumber-ground.—— How fearful the ſequel!—*Thou didſt ſet them in ſlippery places, thou caſtedſt them down into deſtruction. How are they* brought *into deſolation as in a moment! They are utterly conſumed with terrors.*[1] Their joy is as a dream when one awaketh, the very image of it to be deſpiſed; their deſtruction is real and hath no end. It was the juſt remark of an heathen Emperor, who was himſelf alſo afterwards, an unhappy illuſtration of its truth, "That it is uſual for the immortal "gods, ſometimes, to allow greater ſuc-"ceſs, and longer continued impunity, "to thoſe on whom they are determined "to be revenged for their crimes, that, "upon a reverſe of circumſtances, they "may

[1] Pſalm lxxiii. 18, 19.

" may feel the deeper diſtreſs."[k] And what reverſe of circumſtances ſo doleful, as to be one day, one hour, wallowing in the fleſh pleaſing indulgence of ſin — the next in horror and everlaſting deſpair? — Such is the ſad end of the ungodly. *Their own iniquities ſhall take the wicked; they ſhall be holden with the cords of their own ſins.* Tremble, O my ſoul! at their exit — come not into their ſecret — unto their aſſembly be not united. *He ſhall die without inſtruction,* who *in the greatneſs of his folly goes aſtray.*[l]

Sum up the whole and ſay, whether God does not often write the marks of his diſpleaſure, upon thoſe who are diſſatisfied with his wiſe diſtributions, by granting them their deſire, and making that their chaſtiſement or their ruin? — We are taught hence then,

1. To what extent we are permitted to pray to God for temporal mercies —— to make

[k] —— Conſuêſſe deos immortales, quo gravius homines ex commutatione rerum doleant, quos pro ſcelere eorum ulciſci velint, his ſecundiores interdum res, et diuturniorem impunitatem concedere. Julii Cæs. Comment. L. 1. C. 14.

[l] Prov. v. 22, 23.

make a reſerve of his will in every requeſt, and be chiefly earneſt for his bleſſing on all we enjoy.—Our bleſſed Lord has put words into our mouths, as the guide of our petitions herein, *Give us this day our daily Bread*; that is, things really neceſſary. For more than theſe we are forbid to be importunate. Though Jacob lived ſo diſtant from the day of Chriſt, he has given us, what we may call, a fine expoſition of this prayer; *If the Lord*, ſays he, *will give me food to eat, and raiment to put on, ſo that I may come to my father's houſe in peace, then ſhall the Lord be my God.* [m] — No more durſt he aſk. — In perfect conſiſtency with this is the prayer of Agur, *Give me neither poverty nor riches, feed me with food convenient for me!* [n] and alſo that of Jabez, *O that thou wouldſt bleſs me indeed, and enlarge my coaſt, and that thine might be with me, and that thou wouldſt keep me from evil that it may not grieve me!* The addreſs is conceived entirely in general terms; and except the principal matter, that he might be *bleſſed indeed*, with

[m] Gen. xxviii. 20. [n] Prov. xxx. 8.

with ſpiritual bleſſings, he does not venture to particularize the *mode* of the *enlargement of his coaſt*. He left it to the Almighty; *and*, it is added, *the Lord granted what he requeſted*.[o] — To preſume to dictate to God, or aſk of him this or that favour, which *we think* we want, or be fretful at the refuſal, is to impeach infinite wiſdom, or infinite goodneſs; to ſuppoſe that we are more competent judges than the Moſt High, or that he is careleſs and indifferent about our concerns, if not unkind and cruel in denying us. — Is this a temper worthy of a creature, whom God might have formed as he pleaſed, to honour or diſhonour? — No. — Then it is a temper ſtill leſs worthy of a ſinner, who lives by mere mercy, and in whom it would be immodeſt, to think himſelf entitled to the ſmalleſt comfort. — And it is a temper ſtill leſs worthy of a chriſtian, who is redeemed by the precious blood of the Son of God, made an heir of glory, and to whom are given, by the faithful God, *exceeding great and precious promiſes*.[p] — In whatever heart this temper

[o] 1 Chron. iv. 10. [p] 2 Peter i. 4.

temper has (not merely a ſtruggle, the caſe of all God's people, but) a dominion and prevalence, it is highly criminal, and offenſive to him before whom all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing, who is uncontrollable in all his proceedings, *and doth* according to *his will in the armies of heaven, and amongſt the inhabitants of the earth*; whoſe *hand none can ſtay, or ſay unto him, What doeſt thou?* [q] — It becomes us, therefore, to lie in the duſt before the Lord — to ſeek contentment with our lot — to be followers of, not guides and directors to, the Almighty. It becomes us to watch, to pray and ſtrive againſt every emotion of this latter kind. — Not only does duty ſuggeſt it but intereſt alſo. If ſome *aſk and receive not, becauſe they aſk amiſs, that they may conſume it upon their luſts,* [r] others, who are taught to preſent their petitions in a proper manner, and with reſignation to God's will, ſhall be repleniſhed with every thing which will contribute to their comfort, improvement, and uſefulneſs. — *None of them that truſt in him ſhall be deſolate.* [s]

[q] Dan. iv. 35. [r] James iv. 3. [s] Pſalm xxxiv. 22.

—— The obſervations from the text afford inſtruction, alſo,

2. To enjoy the mercies we receive, with thankfulneſs to God. —— Thankfulneſs, in our caſe, includes humility, or a lowly confeſſion that we are *not worthy of the leaſt of all the mercies which God hath ſhewn us*,[t] as well as a grateful acknowledgment of the hand of God in providing for us. Sin was the reaſon why God ſent a plague to take off the Iſraelites our text refers to. And have we not ſinned and deſerved like wrath? The queſtion is natural, upon a reflection on our unfruitfulneſs and diſobedience, Might not every morſel we eat have been our laſt, and our ſouls taken up their everlaſting abode in hell? Eſpecially, might not this have been the portion of thoſe, who never ſought God's bleſſing on what they eat — who have ſat down to meat and riſen up, without ever calling on the name of the Lord? —— How irrational would it be to expect God's bleſſing, when it is not thought worth ſeeking! —— Might not they, moreover, have expected

[t] Geneſis xxxii. 10.

expected his heavieſt judgments, whoſe mouths mingled blaſphemy, profaneneſs, and horrid imprecations, with the food they partook of? — Compare, then, what you have enjoyed, with what you have deſerved, and ſay, whether the long ſuffering, the forbearance, and goodneſs of God, does not equally appear with his power, in ſending and continuing the ſupports and comforts of life, to creatures ſo thoughtleſs, ſo wicked, ſo unconcerned about rendering him the glory due unto his name, yea, ſo bent upon diſhonouring that ſacred name? The ſtricter our enquiry is into the malignity of ſin, and the number and aggravations of our own tranſgreſſions, the more exalted views we ſhall have of the mercy and love of God, and ſee more of the propriety of thankfulneſs and praiſe. And when we add to all this, the thought of our own folly, and the many inſtances in which our *lofty eyes* have been *exerciſed in things too high for us*,[u] we may bleſs God, that he did not give us our deſires, and make them inſtruments of vexation to us. *How ex-*

[u] Pſalm cxxxi. 1.

cellent is his loving-kindneſs in all the earth![w] He is gracious and full of compaſſion; his mercy is plenteous as our wants, and abounds over our ſins. May his goodneſs lead us to repentance, and, whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, to do all to the glory of God! —— Which leads me to obſerve,

3. That if we are forbid to ſeek the world with too much ſolicitude, in ſpiritual matters we have unbounded liberty. —— *If any man lack wiſdom, let him aſk of God, who giveth to all men,* who ſeek him, *liberally, and upbraideth not*[x] with any of their former miſimprovements. Here the more earneſt we are the better — in ſeeking the broken and contrite heart — in ſeeking a ſaving acquaintance with Jeſus Chriſt, and to be fed with him, the heavenly manna, the bread of life — in ſeeking communion with God, to love him and live to him — in ſeeking to be cleanſed from all filthineſs of the fleſh and of the ſpirit — in ſeeking a conformity to the image of the bleſſed Jeſus, to be like God, and to poſſeſs a meetneſs

[w] Pſalm xxxvi. 7. [x] James i. 5.

neſs for the enjoyment of him in glory. — Theſe are bleſſings, which cannot be too ardently enquired after. But theſe are bleſſings, the leaſt prized in the world; and the want of a right ſenſe of their value, raiſes worldly objects ſo high in the eſteem of men, and cauſes ſuch an anxious ſtrife after them in their lives. But let me reſt my appeal with you, after what has been ſaid, Which of theſe is the beſt portion? — Which will appear the beſt, in the ſeaſon of affliction? — Which in the hour of death? — Which in the day of ſolemn account? Can death be bribed? Or will the Judge of all be tampered with? What would riches avail, then, in the day of wrath, if the ſinner could carry them all with him? — Much more what, when the ſinner, ſtripped of all his earthly endowments, ſtripped of all his airy hopes, ſtripped of all his vain excuſes, has nothing to ſerve for a counterpoiſe, againſt the immenſe load of guilt he has heaped up for the day of wrath, but ſinks as a mill-ſtone in the great deep? May God affect unawakened minds with theſe momentous truths, and, by the power of

his grace, teach them *to provide bags which wax not old, a treaſure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth*; [y] — in other words, may he make them *wiſe unto ſalvation, through faith which is in Chriſt Jeſus!* [z] Amen.

[y] Luke xii. 33. [z] 2 Tim. iii. 15.

HYMN.

1. WHEN Iſrael ſins, the Lord reproves,
And fills their hearts with dread;
Yet he forgives the men he loves,
And ſends them heav'nly bread.

2. But they in murm'ring language ſaid,
"Manna is all our feaſt:
"We loathe this light, this airy bread,
"We muſt have fleſh to taſte."

3. He gave them all their own deſire;
And greedy as they fed,
His vengeance burnt with ſecret fire,
And ſmote the rebels dead.

DISCOURSE XIII.

The reproof of Balaam's aſs.

NUMBERS xxii. 28.

And the Lord opened the mouth of the aſs, and ſhe ſaid unto Balaam, "What have "I done unto thee, that thou haſt ſmitten "me theſe three times?" ——

IF perſonal obſervation were the alone ground of our aſſent to matters of fact, and we bound to believe them, only as far as they are analogous to things with which we are commonly converſant, our knowledge of the world would be very contracted, and faith in teſtimony, human or divine, in a great meaſure deſtroyed.

A ſmall degree of reflection will convince us, that in a variety of caſes we are obliged to argue and to act upon the

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teſtimony of other people, yea, in caſes not conſonant to our own experience; and that a total refuſal of credit to ſuch teſtimony would be running into the very depths of ſcepticiſm, precluding an enquiry into the hiſtory of events, ſtopping up the avenues of information, and reducing ourſelves to the moſt painful uncertainty.

Suppoſing then, the evidence in other reſpects good — ſuppoſing the facts atteſted are not flatly contradictory — ſuppoſing the witneſſes to be honeſt and undeſigning men, who have the knowledge of what they teſtify, and give their teſtimony in a clear and conſiſtent manner, the faculties of the mind conſtrain our aſſent to them, though we never ſaw facts of the kind related, and admit their poſſibility, though we may not thoroughly comprehend how they can be.

Upon theſe principles a man might ſafely believe, that water can become of that ſolidity, as to ſuſtain people and carriages upon its ſurface, if he had never ſeen ice, nor was able to underſtand what froſt means. Upon theſe principles

ciples we may believe, that in ſome parts of the earth the ſun, in one ſeaſon of the year never ſets, in another never riſes, though we have not been eye-witneſſes of this phænomenon, nor poſſeſs philoſophy ſufficient to inveſtigate its cauſe. And upon the ſame principles, may the miracles related in the Bible be admitted as credible. [a] It cannot with juſtice be aſſerted, that they are impoſſible — that they carry in them any thing contradictory — or are beyond the power of God to effect. And if their teſtimony be in other reſpects well-ſupported, they ought, in all reaſon, to be entertained as facts which have really happened, in the manner the ſcripture declares.

This leads me to conſider the very extraordinary hiſtory to which my text relates. — It begins in the former chapter. — After Iſrael had left Egypt, had miraculouſly paſſed the Red ſea, and defeated two armies which oppoſed their paſſage through the wilderneſs, the other nations adjacent to the deſert, alarmed at their

[a] Dr. Campbell, againſt Hume's Eſſay on Miracles. Part 1. Sect. 2.

multitude, and what they did to the Amorites, became exceedingly jealous of them; and, not aware of the ſupernatural method by which they were fed, thought they would *lick up the proviſion, as the ox licketh up the graſs.* Amongſt theſe, Balak king of Moab diſtinguiſhed himſelf. And the moſt eligible ſcheme that occurred to him of prevailing againſt Iſrael, was to execrate or curſe them. This was not a proceeding unuſual to the heathens, as they ſuppoſed their gods to be agitated by the ſame malignant paſſions which raged in their own breaſts, and that they might be moved, if not impelled, by incantations and ſpells, to do whatever their votaries wiſhed. For the purpoſe, therefore, of bringing Iſrael under the divine diſpleaſure, Balak (from the ſame corrupt notion of the God of Iſrael, which he entertained of the falſe deities) ſent for Balaam the ſon of Beor, from Pethor, a village of Meſopotamia near the river Euphrates, to curſe Iſrael; induced, probably, by the profeſſion Balaam made of worſhipping the ſame God Iſrael worſhipped, and the

ſame

fame he had of being a favourite of that God. — Balaam is called in one place a ſoothſayer or magician. His whole hiſtory diſcovers him to have been a wicked man. And unleſs we believe, with ſome learned writers, that the gift of prophecy was conferred on bad men, we muſt look upon him, before this time at leaſt, as a pretended prophet — a juggler, who by his tricks had the art of making ignorant people ſtare, and attained, in thoſe dark regions, to ſuch a degree of reputation, that even the king of Moab was confident, *thoſe whom Balaam bleſſed were bleſſed, and thoſe whom Balaam curſed were curſed.*

Ineffectual as the curſes of this impoſtor muſt have been, and totally incapable of injuring a people defended by omnipotence, it may be aſked, "Why "did the Lord prevent him from ut-"tering his imprecations?" I anſwer, the Lord knew that weak as Balaam's curſes were, Balak might be encouraged by them to haraſs Iſrael, and if the Iſraelites heard of the affair, they would be rendered more timid thereby, prone as they were

to ſuperſtition; while, on the other hand, if Balaam was not ſuffered to curſe, Balak would be diſcouraged, and Iſrael rejoice. He did not, therefore, permit the intended malediction; which may teach us, that if our ways pleaſe the Lord, he can not only prevent our enemies from doing us injury, but even ſpeaking to our hurt. — Balak ſent ſaying, "*This* "*people are too mighty for me; come thou* "*therefore and curſe them; peradventure* "*I may prevail againſt them.*" The meſſengers came (with more than the cuſtomary Oriental preſent on viſiting a ſtranger) *with the rewards of divination in their hand.* The prophet took upon him great ſtate, as all ſuch people do. He deſired them to lodge with him that night, that he might, as he pretended, conſult his god. And in a dream, Jehovah did actually appear to him, ſaying, "*What* "*men are theſe with thee? Thou ſhalt* "*not go with them. Thou ſhalt not curſe* "*the people, for they are bleſſed.*" —— Wicked as Balaam was, his fears were excited by this viſion; ſo that, terrified at the reſtraint laid upon him, he roſe up

up in the morning, and ſaid unto the princes of Balak, "*Get ye into your land,* "*for the Lord refuſeth to give me leave* "*to go with you.*" The princes returned, accordingly, to their maſter. And Balak thinking it all a ſham — that Balaam wanted to make his market of him, and he had not come up to the prophet's price, ſent an embaſſy in a more honourable and ſplendid manner — *princes more and more honourable than they.* To ſuch meanneſſes can great men deſcend, for bad purpoſes! More than this, he promiſed Balaam vaſt preferment if he would curſe Iſrael. What now was Balaam's duty? — Seeing the Lord had already forbid him to curſe the people, was it his duty to tamper again with the meſſengers, and feign to ſeek the Lord, as if the Lord could change his mind? — No. — He ſhould have reſiſted them immediately, and replied, "I cannot go." — But tamper he did. — His heart luſted after the honours of Balak. And though he inſinuated to the meſſengers, that "*If Balak would give him his houſe* "*full of ſilver and gold, he could not go* "*beyond*

" *beyond the word of the Lord his God,* " *to do leſs or more,*" he tempted God, and wiſhed for the liberty of curſing the Lord's people. —— When men come to a certain pitch of iniquity, it is not unuſual for God, to ſuffer them to do what their hearts deſire, in order to bring them the more effectually, to correction or puniſhment. So it is repreſented in this chapter, as if the Lord was prevailed on to give Balaam permiſſion, to go with the meſſengers. But the words cannot imply more than this, " Well, if thou " wilt go, thou muſt take thy own way: " but know, that it ſhall be to no pur- " poſe; for thou ſhalt not ſay a word " more than I pleaſe." — Becauſe Balaam was not again poſitively reſtrained, he took it liberty was granted, and in the morning told the princes of Moab, that he was ready to go with them. — But God was angry with this wicked man, and determined to ſtop him. For which end an angel was diſpatched to ſtand in the way, and, with a drawn ſword, oppoſe his journey. The eyes of Balaam and the princes of Moab were at firſt

ſuper-

ſupernaturally holden, that they did not perceive the angel; but the aſs on which Balaam rode perceived him, and turned aſide out of the path. Balaam was enraged and ſmote the aſs. But what could the poor creature do? A wall being on each ſide of the road, and the angel ſtill oppoſing her paſſage, ſhe thruſt herſelf unto the wall, and cruſhed Balaam's foot. This misfortune ſo exaſperated the rider, that he unmercifully ſmote her again. At laſt, coming into a very narrow avenue, the angel ſtood directly before her, and there was no room to turn to the right hand or left. Urged by Balaam on the one hand, and reſiſted by the angel on the other, the aſs fell down, and Balaam's wrath was kindled ſo vehemently, that he beat her with a ſtaff. Upon which the Lord opened the mouth of the aſs, and ſhe ſpoke with an articulate voice, ſaying, "*What have I done* "*unto thee, that thou haſt ſmitten me* "*theſe three times?*" [b] — The fury of the

[b] "The aſs was enabled to utter ſuch and ſuch "ſounds, probably, as parrots do, without un- "derſtanding

the man, poſſibly, prevented his adverting to the miraculous manner in which the

" derſtanding them: and ſay what you will of
" the conſtruction of the aſs's mouth, of the
" formation of the tongue and jaws being unfit
" for ſpeaking, yet an adequate cauſe is aſſigned
" for this wonderful effect, for it is ſaid expreſsly,
" that *the Lord opened the mouth of the aſs*; and
" no one who believes a God, can doubt of his
" having power to do this, and much more. But
" it is thought ſtrange, that Balaam ſhould ex-
" preſs no ſurprize upon this extraordinary oc-
" caſion: but perhaps he had been accuſtomed to
" prodigies with his enchantments; or perhaps
" believing the Eaſtern doctrine of the tranſmi-
" gration of human ſouls into the bodies of brutes,
" he might think ſuch a humanized brute not in-
" capable of ſpeaking; or perhaps he might not
" regard, or attend to the wonder, through ex-
" ceſs of rage or *madneſs*, as the word is in St.
" Peter; or perhaps (which is the moſt probable
" of all) he might be greatly diſturbed and aſto-
" niſhed, as Joſephus affirms he was, and yet Mo-
" ſes in his ſhort hiſtory might omit this circum-
" ſtance. The miracle was by no means needleſs
" or ſuperfluous; it was very proper to convince
" Balaam, that the mouth and tongue were under
" God's direction, and that the ſame divine power
" which cauſed the dumb aſs to ſpeak contrary
" to its nature, could make him in like manner
" utter bleſſings contrary to his inclination. And
" accord-

the queſtion was put, and he anſwered her as a familiar acquaintance, " Why " did I ſmite thee? *Becauſe thou haſt* " *mocked me theſe three times. I would there* " *were a ſword in mine hand, for now would* " *I kill thee.*" And the aſs ſaid unto Balaam, " *Am not I thine aſs, upon which* " *thou haſt ridden ever ſince I was thine* " *unto this day? Was I ever wont to do* " *ſo unto thee?* If I always carried thee " without the leaſt diſaſter until now, is " it not clear that ſomething extraordi- " nary muſt have happened, to cauſe me " to go againſt thy will at this time?" The ſoft anſwer turned away the prophet's wrath. He could not but acknowledge the juſtice of the remark. And he was not long, in finding out the cauſe referred to. For *the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he ſaw the angel of the Lord ſtanding in the way, and his ſword drawn.* Terrified at the apparition, *he bowed*

" accordingly he was over-ruled to bleſs the peo- " ple, though he came prepared and diſpoſed to " curſe them, which was the greater miracle of " the two, for the aſs was merely paſſive, but " Balaam reſiſted the good motions of God."

Newton on prophecy, vol. I. p. 119, 120.

bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face. And the angel ſaid unto him, " *Wherefore haſt thou ſmitten thine aſs?* " It was not her fault. *Behold, I went* " *forth to withſtand thee, becauſe thy way* " *is perverſe before me. And the aſs ſaw* " *me, and turned from me theſe three times.* " *Surely unleſs ſhe had turned from me, I* " *had ere this ſlain thee, and ſaved her* " *alive.*" So angry are people, ſometimes, at thoſe very croſſes of their views and deſires, which prove at laſt, the means of ſaving their lives! —— Balaam was moved. He offered to go back. But, having come thus far, the Lord permitted him to proceed, being reſolved to prove to Balak's face, that he would not curſe Iſrael. Accordingly in the ſequel of the ſtory, we read how Balak, in order to pay the higher compliment to the prophet, came to the border of his dominions to meet him, and after a gentle rebuke took him to his own houſe; and that after many different experiments tried, in the hope of charming the Lord into a conceſſion, that Iſrael ſhould be curſed, Balaam was forced to pronounce them bleſſed,

bleſſed, to propheſy that they ſhould be a great and flouriſhing people, to foretell that the Deliverer, the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, ſhould riſe out of them, and declare in moſt expreſs terms, that no inchantment or divination can prevail againſt a people whoſe God is the Lord. I ſay, he was obliged to deliver this meſſage, to the confuſion of the Moabites; but at the ſame time, he wickedly ſet Balak upon too ſucceſsful a ſcheme to enſnare Iſrael, by tempting their ſons to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab — a ſcheme he thought the moſt likely to lead them to ſerve the gods of the heathen, which he knew would provoke the moſt High — and a ſcheme, indeed, ſo fatally miſchievous, that it iſſued in the deſtruction of *twenty four thouſand men.* [c]

What inſtruction may be deduced from this paſſage, and particularly that part recorded in our text, *The Lord opened the mouth of the aſs, and ſhe ſaid unto Balaam,* "*What have I done unto thee that thou* "*haſt ſmitten me theſe three times?*" Two things the words teach us.

I. That

[c] Numbers xxv. 1——10.

I. That God can bring glory to himſelf by ways which, according to outward appearances, ſeem very unlikely to produce it. And,

II. That God can rebuke and puniſh for ſin, at times and by methods ſinners little expect.

I. God can do himſelf honour by ways, in appearance very unlikely to produce ſuch an effect. —— When Balaam refuſed to acknowledge the Lord before the princes of Moab: when Balaam joined in their wicked project: when they all went on their way exulting — Balaam, that he ſhould obtain *the wages of unrighteouſneſs*[d] — and the Moabites, that Iſrael would be an accurſed people: when they ſeemed to triumph in their iniquity, and act as if there was no God to behold them, the Lord opened the mouth of an aſs, to praiſe him and confeſs his power. It reminds us, that nothing is with God impoſſible. Perhaps an inſtance exactly parallel to this has not been authenticated, before or ſince. Yet in very ſurpriſing caſes

[d] 2 Peter ii. 15.

caſes God has often proved, that he can erect to himſelf a monument of praiſe, of materials, in themſelves, altogether unpromiſing. —— To this purpoſe, though in figurative language, John the Baptiſt warned the Jews, not to depend upon their deſcent from Abraham, as an encouragement to ſin with impunity, for rather than not have a people to glorify him, and fill up his church, God would *of the ſtones raiſe up* ſpiritual *children to Abraham.* [e] — To the ſame purpoſe was the reply of our Saviour, to an inſolent demand of the Phariſees, that he would rebuke the multitude crying before him, *Bleſſed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord.* "*I tell you, that if theſe* "*ſhould hold their peace, the ſtones would* "*immediately cry out.*" [f] —— And wonders equal to this has God done, to ſhew his power, and that they who reject Jeſus the Lord's anointed, only hurt themſelves thereby; ſtill Chriſt ſhall reign in Zion; the Lord has fixed, the Lord will uphold him there, and infallibly raiſe up a ſeed to ſerve him. *Out of the mouths of babes and*

[e] Matt. iii. 9. [f] Luke xix. 40.

and ſucklings hath he perfected praiſe. In the very face of the chief prieſts and rulers of the Jews, who hated Chriſt, and notwithſtanding their ſore diſpleaſure, the little children ſhouted in the temple, *Hoſanna to the Son of David.* [g] God has alſo called children by his grace, in their younger years, brought them to be concerned for their ſouls, to confeſs Chriſt, and avouch the Lord for their portion. And he has given ſtrength to weak and unlearned chriſtians — babes in knowledge, whoſe education was but low, and outward advantages very ſmall, who could no more than read, or ſcarcely that, he has enabled ſuch I ſay, when called upon, to ſpeak for his name, and give a reaſon of the hope within them, even before his and their perſecutors, thereby fulfilling his promiſe, *When they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye ſhall ſpeak; for it ſhall be given you in the ſame hour what ye ſhall ſpeak.* [h] More than that, Jeſus has compelled his very enemies to confeſs, and yield him homage. Judas, who betrayed the Son of God, was driven to the

[g] Matt. xxi. 15. [h] Matt. x. 19.

the acknowledgment that he had betrayed innocent blood.[i] Before Pilate condemned him, he voluntarily admitted *there was no fault in him*.[k] And the infernal ſpirits bore their reluctant teſtimony, that he was the *holy One of God*[l]——But I mean to ſpeak more particularly of thoſe inſtances, wherein the power of God's grace has been exerted, to convert men from the dominion of ſin and enmity of the carnal mind, that they might glorify himſelf. It was foretold by the prophet Iſaiah, that in the days of the goſpel, *the beaſts of the field* ſhould *honour God, the dragons and the owls.*[m] What honour could be expected from creatures deſtitute of reaſon, ſome ſpecies of which alſo are moſt ſluggiſh and ſtupid, others moſt fierce and deſtructive? And yet, if Balaam's aſs praiſed God, could not the ſame energy derive like praiſe, from creatures as diſtant from reaſon? But we are to underſtand that text rather, as a metaphorical

[i] See an excellent argument for the chriſtian religion, in a pamphlet entitled, *Obſervations on the character and conduct of Judas Iſcariot.*

[k] Luke xxiii. 4. [l] Matt. viii. 29. [m] Iſa. xliii. 20.

rical deſcription of wicked men, who are blinded and beſotted by ſin, and many of whoſe tempers are to the utmoſt fierce and miſchievous.—When we behold ſuch a ſinner, *doing evil with both hands earneſtly* [n] — defying his Maker — perſiſting in wicked practices — hardening his heart — ſitting in the ſeat of the ſcorner, and ridiculing all that is righteous and holy — curſing, ſwearing, and calling for damnation — unawed by the terrors of the Lord, or the execution of his wrath upon others, we are ready to ſay, "There is "a wretch ripening for miſery. We have "no hopes of him. We fear he will "go down to the lake of fire. He is "grown grey in the ſervice of Satan, "and is proof againſt all ſpoken to him. "He has heard the word many years, and "inſtead of becoming more awakened, "he laughs at the ſhaking of God's ſpear, "and makes nothing of his threatenings." "Lord, *can theſe dry bones live?*" — To be ſure it is, humanly ſpeaking, very improbable. But is any thing impracticable by God? How often has he, who with a word

[n] Micah vii. 3.

a word raiſed dead Lazarus, who turned out the deaf and dumb ſpirit, quickened the ſpiritually dead, cauſed the ſpiritually deaf to hear his voice, and the dumb to ſing his praiſes! Had we lived cotemporaries with Saul of Tarſus, the furious perſecutor of the church of the living God — had we heard the multitude of threatenings he *breathed out* — had we beheld his cruel pleaſure, in tormenting the diſciples of the holy Jeſus, we ſhould have thought a wild beaſt had entered into the chriſtian fold — and had we been told, that upon a journey to Damaſcus, armed with new terrors, he was ſtruck down by a light from heaven; without heſitation we ſhould have concluded, "Sudden vengeance hath arreſted "the monſter, and his ſoul is ſent to "hell." But how different our thoughts from thoſe of God, and our ways from his ways! This Saul was afterwards the Apoſtle Paul, an heroic preacher of that goſpel which before he deſtroyed, and one example, out of the many, wherein God has wrought miracles of grace — ſoftened the heart of ſtone — reconciled enemies,

and converted them into friends — changed them from ridiculing religion, to love the things of God — from profaneneſs and blaſphemy to prayer and ſupplication — from pride to humility — from deceit to truth — from doing miſchief to doing good — from zealouſly ſerving Satan, to be fervent in ſpirit ſerving the Lord. So it was propheſied, that by the power of the goſpel, men of the worſt tempers ſhall be changed, and in the church of Chriſt, *the wolf ſhall dwell with the lamb; and the leopard ſhall lie down with the kid; and the calf, and the young lion and fatling together, and a little child ſhall lead* them.[o] — *The wolf and the lamb ſhall feed together. They ſhall not deſtroy in all my holy mountain, ſaith the Lord.*[p]

"Lions and beaſts of ſavage name,
"Put on the meekneſs of the lamb.
"Whilſt the wide world eſteems it ſtrange;
"Gaze, and admire, and hate the change."

WATTS.

—— Let them gaze on. The change is the wonder of heaven, and the amazement of the church on earth. 'Tis for the

[o] Iſaiah xi. 6. [p] Iſaiah lxv. 25.

the honour of God in this world, and his eternal glory in the world to come. And ought not theſe examples to teach you, chriſtians, never to deſpair of the worſt of ſinners? They are deſperately wicked it is granted; but they are not out of God's reach. He has worked upon as bad materials, let them have come to the utmoſt you apprehend of them. Still hope — pray — labour. — God is the author of marvellous things. As he drew praiſe to himſelf from Balaam's aſs, ſo he can extract it from ſouls the moſt wretched and inſenſible. —— And 'tis equally true,

II. That if men perſiſt in ſin, God can in as unlooked-for a manner, correct and puniſh them.—Our text is a proof of the truth of this remark. Balaam was *rebuked for his iniquity*, ſays the Apoſtle Peter, *the dumb aſs, ſpeaking with man's voice, forbad the madneſs of the prophet.* [q] Nor is the hand of God to be leſs traced or leſs regarded, when the rebuke has come in the common courſe of provi-

[q] 2 Peter ii. 16.

dence. The awakened conſciences of Joſeph's brethren teſtified againſt them, that God had found out their iniquity towards their brother, when being in Egypt they ſtood as criminals before that very Joſeph, and imagined him their enemy. Their preſent diſtreſs recalled to their guilty minds, that unfeeling ſpirit with which they had formerly beheld the affliction of Joſeph, and exulted in the calamity they thought to bring upon him. *We are verily guilty concerning our brother*, they ſay, *in that we ſaw the anguiſh of his ſoul, when he beſought us and we would not hear; therefore is this diſtreſs come upon us.*[r] Perhaps in the moment ſinners think themſelves moſt ſecure, God's rebukes may be neareſt. — In the moment Nebuchadnezzar's ſelf-complacency was at the higheſt, and he boaſted, *Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the houſe of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majeſty? — while the words were in the king's mouth*[s] was the ſentence paſſed, and within the hour executed, that his underſtanding ſhould be

[r] Gen. xlii. 21. [s] Daniel iv. 30.

be taken away, his kingdom depart from him, and himſelf be turned out as the ox that eateth graſs. — Happy when, as in the two caſes juſt ſpecified, the rebuke has had the proper effect, through grace, to humble the ſinners, raiſe in them the fear of the God of heaven, lead them to confeſs their ſins, and abſtain from them in future.[t] Happy for Balaam, had the rebukes of God ſtopped the current of his iniquity. But, though reſtrained from doing all his heart meditated, he ſtill perſiſted in oppoſing God and his people, and at laſt fell in the field of battle, fighting againſt the armies of Iſrael.[u] They whom correction does not reform, are often made awful ſpectacles for the warning of ſurrounding tranſgreſſors. — Conſidering alſo the deceitfulneſs and hardening nature of ſin, the puniſhment muſt of neceſſity ſurprize the ſinners — muſt find them aſleep, in a

[t] The life of John Bunyan informs us, that an unexpected reproof, from a woman of a vicious character alſo, was the firſt means of awakening him from his profligate courſe of life.

[u] Numbers xxxi. 8.

ſtate of fancied ſecurity — muſt therefore come in an unexpected manner; agreeably to which runs the threatening, *He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, ſhall ſuddenly be deſtroyed, and that without remedy.*[w] — Accordingly, let us obſerve the conduct of divine juſtice, in ſome of thoſe fearful examples left upon ſacred record. The morning Sodom and Gomorrah were deſtroyed, the ſun roſe upon them as uſual, and danger did not ſeem near. The pious admonitions, and haſty flight of Lot, were by ſome intended to be next day, the favourite topics of ridicule. But though no ſymptoms of the approaching deſtruction as yet appeared, quickly the cloud of vengeance burſt upon them; *and lo, the ſmoke of the country went up as the ſmoke of a furnace.*[x] —— We read in the book of Judges, that Abimelech the ſon of Gideon, in a treacherous and cruel manner, ſlew his ſeventy brethren, to make way for his own advancement to the throne of Iſrael; he ſlaughtered, moreover, hundreds of the She-

[w] Proverbs xxix. 1.

[x] Gen. xix. 23. 28. See Diſ. 8. Vol. I. p. 171.

Shechemites who oppoſed him; and, in the triumph of victory, was proceeding to deſtroy the fortification of Thebez, when the intended deſolation was prevented by an unlooked-for ſtroke, which brought him to an untimely end. — A certain woman, from the top of the tower caſt a piece of a mill-ſtone, which alighting upon his head fractured his ſkull. So did this barbarous warriour fall by the hands of a woman, and *God rendered unto Abimelech the wickedneſs which he did.*[y] —— In the midſt alſo of Belſhazzar's impious feaſt, he beheld with aſtoniſhment the *hand-writing upon the wall*, that took away his kingdom from him, and ſentenced him to death.[z] — And the inſtant that Herod's vanity was raiſed to the higheſt pitch — when the profane flattery of his minions ſhouted their applauſe of his eloquence, in this impious ſtrain, "*The "voice of a god, and not of a man!*" — *Immediately the angel of the Lord ſmote him, becauſe he gave not God the glory*, by reprimanding the people, *and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghoſt*,[a] to ſhew,

[y] Judges ix. 56. [z] Dan. v. 6. [a] Acts xii. 22, 23.

that though extolled as a God, he ſhould die like a wretch. —— Nor is the Bible the only authentic hiſtory, through which ſimilar examples are tranſmitted. We tremble to read of the nobleman, who wiſhed if his aſſeveration were not true, the bread he then eat might choke him, and it did choke him. [b] Have not the profane, alſo, reaſon to ſtand aghaſt, at hearing of people dying with execrations in their mouths? And if death overtake any man in his ſins — overtake him at unawares, and find him unprepared, his end is too terrible to admit of particular deſcription. Becauſe the Lord is long-ſuffering, *and ſentence againſt an evil work is not executed ſpeedily, therefore the heart of the ſons of men is fully ſet in them to do evil.*[c] Becauſe puniſhment is for a while ſuſpended, they vainly imagine God takes no notice of their actions, or is too indulgent to call them to account; they hope

[b] Godwin Earl of Kent in the reign of Edward the Confeſſor. The aſſeveration reſpected his innocence of the death of the king's brother. —— Blackſtone's Commentaries, Vol. IV. p. 339. 8vo. Edition.

[c] Eccleſ. viii. 11.

hope therefore to ſin with impunity, and treat his denunciations as a jeſt. But they will find them executed in earneſt. The *Judge*, who *ſtandeth before the door*,[d] may ſummon them to his tribunal, when they are leaſt apprehenſive of his approach. *Damnation ſlumbereth not*[e] though careleſs ſinners ſlumber. Whilſt *they ſay peace and ſafety, ſudden deſtruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they ſhall not eſcape.*[f] May God, with whom are the hearts of all men, prevent their ruin, by effectually awakening them to liſten to the voice of conſcience — to regard with ſolemnity the admonitions of the Bible — to flee from the wrath to come, to Jeſus the almighty Saviour — to walk no longer in the broad way that leadeth to deſtruction, but tread the narrow path which leadeth to life. So will there be joy in heaven, and in the church below; and my ſoul will rejoice — even mine.

[d] James v. 9. [e] 2 Pet. ii. 3. [f] 1 Theſſ. v. 3.

DISCOURSE XIV.

Samſon's victory with the jaw-bone of an aſs.

JUDGES XV. 15.

And he found a new jaw-bone of an aſs, and put forth his hand and took it, and ſlew a thouſand men therewith.

IF the command of Chriſt to his diſciples, to *gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be loſt*,[g] was prudent in a matter of wordly œconomy, it is much more a part of chriſtian prudence, in regard to divine and ſpiritual things. This care conſiſts, in diligently improving the looſe particles of our time, and cloſely attending to every thing God ſpeaks to us, either by the diſpenſations of his providence, or the voice of his word;

[g] John vi. 12.

word; treaſuring it up, and watching for every inſtruction that we can draw from it. The reſult of this prudent management is what we call *experience*; and the want of it the reaſon the lives of multitudes are waſted inſtead of ſpent; people are ſo ignorant and ſo diſſipated, ſo void of foreſight, ſo bewildered, and have ſo few good rules, or ſettled maxims, to ſteer their conduct through the difficulties, and ſupport them under the trials, of this life of many viciſſitudes.—— The neglect of this prudent care alſo, is the reaſon ſo many parts of God's word are curſorily paſſed over and ſpeedily forgot, or elſe fooliſhly trifled with, and made the ground of drollery and mirth, which, if duly ſearched into, might afford ſerious and important inſtruction.

You will readily underſtand, from what I have ſaid, that I mean to draw ſuch inſtruction from the words of my text; in order to which, it is neceſſary to relate the ſtory connected with it. —— The children of Iſrael after their departure out of Egypt, and during that period of their reſidence in Canaan which was

prior to their requeſt of a king from amongſt themſelves, were a theocracy; that is, God was their ſovereign and civil governor. But that he might deliver his orders to them in a more familiar manner, as they could bear them, he raiſed up and qualified certain perſons to be his mouth to the people, and to be, alſo, their oſtenſible leaders. Such a leader was Moſes, who conducted them through the wilderneſs. Such was Joſhua, under whoſe direction they conquered Canaan. And after the death of Joſhua, the appointment fell upon different perſons, marked out by Providence for the office. Theſe were called the *Judges*, moſt of whom found the nation in a very critical and perilous ſituation. —— For the moſt part it happens, that long-continued proſperity is as hurtful to nations and collective bodies of people, as to individuals. This was ſo remarkably the caſe of Iſrael, that hardly was there an inſtance of their exemption from oppreſſion for any length of time, but they waxed careleſs and vain, they worſhipped the idols, and conformed to the abominable

nable cuſtoms of the heathen around them. The Lord therefore gave them frequently into the hands of their enemies, and made them the ſervants and tributaries of thoſe nations, to follow whoſe idolatries and manners, they had forſaken the true God. And yet, while he chaſtiſed them and made them feel the bitterneſs of their apoſtacy from him, he did not give them over to ruin; but when they cried to him in their bondage, he conſtantly inſpired one or more of their number, with ſpirit to undertake the deliverance of their country, and abilities ſuitable to the undertaking; ſome being diſtinguiſhed for their ſuperiour wiſdom, courage, or zeal; and one for a ſtrength of body ſo aſtoniſhing, that he is juſtly eſteemed the ſtrongeſt man the world ever ſaw. This was Samſon, of whom the text ſpeaks, and whoſe hiſtory we ſhall now relate.

His birth and conduct in life were ſupernaturally revealed by an Angel, to Manoah and his wife, Samſon's father and mother. The orders of the Angel were, that the child ſhould be a Nazarite,

rite, ſeparated unto the Lord, and that no razor ſhould come upon his head; and he promiſed that Samſon ſhould *begin* (what Samuel's adminiſtration afterwards completed) the deliverance of Iſrael from the Philiſtines, who at that time held them in ſevere bondage. The Angel diſappeared, and Samſon was born at the time ſpoken of. He grew up an active youth, and it was ſoon diſcovered that the Spirit of the Lord was with him, communicating to him a degree of ſtrength, ſuperiour to men in common, and exciting him at certain ſeaſons, to diſtinguiſh himſelf by feats of hardineſs or valour. — But ſo little does he ſeem to have ſought an occaſion of quarrelling with the Philiſtines, that he even joined himſelf in marriage to a daughter of that nation, which, though not quite agreeable to the command of God, and (as all ſuch unſuitable engagements will) brought affliction upon Samſon, yet ſhews he bore them no ill-will, 'till their own injuſtice drew it upon them. —— In going down to Timnath, to viſit his intended bride, he was attacked by a lion, which, the Spirit of the Lord coming

coming mightily upon him, he rent as he would a kid. Walking the ſame way ſometime after, in order to conſummate his marriage, he found a ſwarm of bees and honey, in the carcaſe of the lion. He took of it himſelf, and gave thereof to his father and mother, without acquainting them how he came by it. The circumſtance rather ſuggeſted to his good-natured mind, the having amuſement from it for his marriage-gueſts. Accordingly he turned it into a riddle which ran thus, "*Out of the eater came forth meat*; *and* "*out of the ſtrong came forth ſweetneſs.*" This riddle propounded, the Philiſtines were at a certain time to interpret, on condition of receiving from Samſon thirty *ſheets*, (or *ſhirts* ſay ſome)[h] of fine linen, and

[h] The margin of our Bibles reads *ſhirts*; and it is reaſonable to ſuppoſe this to be the true reading; for (as a learned author expreſſes it) "It "cannot eaſily be imagined that they were what "we mean by *ſheets*, for Samſon might have ſlain "thirty Philiſtines near Aſkelon, and not met "with one ſheet. — If this be allowed to be fact, "it points out the *bitterneſs* of Samſon's ſlaughter "of the Philiſtines (hereafter mentioned) ſince it "ſhews

and thirty changes of raiment, or if they could not, to perform to him the like condition —— Lawleſſneſs and oppreſſion uſually go hand in hand with ignorance, or rather ſpring from it. Fair as the above agreement was, and accepted by the Philiſtines on the proſpect of gain, yet when the day for the diſcovery drew near, and they found themſelves unable to ſolve the riddle, they were enraged at being outwitted by an underling Hebrew, and therefore commanded Samſon's wife, to coax the ſecret out of her huſband, or they threatened to burn her and her father's houſe with fire. Terrified by this menace, and knowing the tyrannical ſpirit of her countrymen, the poor woman with tears beſought Samſon to diſcloſe the riddle to her. At firſt he refuſed, urging that he had not told his own father and mother; but as ſhe, for obvious

" ſhews that they were not thirty common people " of that nation that he ſlew, but thirty perſons " of figure and conſequence; for the common " people ſeldom wore any *ſhirts*." N. B. Sir John Chardin ſuppoſes the word ſignifies *drawers*. —— Harmer's obſervations on divers paſſages of ſcripture, Vol. II. p. 417.

obvious reaſons, was not to be put off, he revealed it to her, and by her means the Philiſtines were ready, at the time appointed, to anſwer the queſtion and claim the wager. — But Samſon gueſſing that they had, as he expreſſed it, *plowed with his heifer* (that is, tampered with his wife) in order to find it out, was fired with indignation at ſo outrageous a breach of the laws of hoſpitality. He immediately declared war againſt the whole nation; and with no other ally than the Spirit of the Almighty, ſtood the champion of Iſrael, determined to chaſtiſe their taſk-maſters. In order to which, he did not pretend to diſpute the claim made upon him by his gueſts, but went to Aſkelon, ſlew thirty Philiſtines, and giving their raiment to diſcharge the demand, withdrew ſilently to his father's houſe, as if convinced at laſt, that ſuch a marriage could produce no comfort. —— However his anger quickly ſubſided, and his affection for his wife returned. He took a preſent in his hand therefore, and went down to her. But how could he expect juſtice from an unrighteous people? Behold,

hold, his wife was ſeduced from him, and actually wedded to a man, of whom Samſon, in the honeſt ſimplicity of his heart, had made a confident, and regarded as a friend. — Nay more, his father in law inſulted him with the offer of his wife's ſiſter, though it was expreſly contrary to the law of Iſrael to marry the other ſiſter, unleſs the firſt wife was dead.[i] Still farther provoked by this affront to himſelf and his religion, Samſon collected three hundred foxes, and in the time of wheat-harveſt, tied them tail to tail, with a firebrand between each tail, ſo diſpoſed that the creatures might have no impediment in running, and let them looſe into the ſtanding corn of the Philiſtines, to the total deſtruction of their corn, their vineyards, and olives, and to revenge which, they inhumanly burned his wife and her father with fire —— This act of cruelty, as might be expected, rouſed Samſon to meditate farther repriſals, and he made ſo many incurſions upon the coaſt, and ſuch grievous havock, that the Philiſtines looked upon him as a kind of

[i] Lev. xviii. 18.

of monſter, and ſent out an army againſt him, as againſt a formidable enemy. — At this time Samſon dwelt ſolitarily on the top of Etam, an high rock and inacceſſible to more than one perſon abreaſt. The Philiſtines ſuſpecting he was countenanced by his countrymen, threatened deſolation unleſs he was given up. The elders of Judah were terrified, and though they did not hope to prevail againſt him by force, thought to perſuade him to be bound and delivered to the Philiſtines, rather than his country ſhould be ſacrificed. Whilſt he argued with them calmly, upon the injuſtice of the proceeding, he would not reſiſt the rulers of his people, but quietly ſubmitted; ſtipulating only that they would not themſelves fall upon him, and force him to deſtroy his own brethren, unkind as they were. This requeſt obtained, he was bound faſt with two new cords, and ſet before the camp of the enemy. The Philiſtines ſhouted for joy. But the Spirit of the Lord came upon Samſon, and in the ardour of his mind he burſt the cords, that they became in his hands as flax burnt with fire. His

bands

bands were unlooſed. But ſtill he had no weapon. The Philiſtines advancing, he had no time to procure one. He took the firſt that he found, which happened to be the jaw-bone of an aſs lately killed. A more clumſy and unſuitable weapon, he could hardly have ſtumbled upon. With this, nevertheleſs, he attacked the armed hoſt of Philiſtia, and ſpread carnage and deſolation where-ever his arm reached. Terror ſeized the army and they fled in diſmay, leaving the victory in favour of Samſon, and leaving alſo a thouſand men dead upon the plain.

I do not intend, in this diſcourſe, to purſue Samſon's hiſtory any further. Neither do I take upon me to apologize for his faults. His ideas of concubinage and ſpirit of revenge are, at leaſt, very inconſiſtent with the purity and benevolence of the goſpel, though it is difficult to ſay, how far the latter is excuſable, in caſes of national oppreſſion. And yet I cannot but think him, upon the whole, a good man; or would the Apoſtle Paul have exhibited him amongſt the Old Teſtament worthies, who *obtained a good report*

port through faith? [k] — On all accounts, however, he ſtands upon ſacred record, a remarkable inſtance of the power of almighty God reſiding in a creature. No doubt that power exiſted in Samſon, in a miraculous and ſupernatural manner. Nor does it appear to have abode with him without intermiſſion, but rather come upon him at times, when the ſupply was neceſſary. I do not mean to ſuppoſe any ſuch miraculous influence now exerted. But there is one truth the words certainly teach us, "That God can do great things "by means of ſmall inſtruments." Samſon was in himſelf no more than a man, and his hair being cut, through the treachery of Delilah, in conſequence thereof the Spirit of the Lord for a time departed from him, and he ſhewed that he was compoſed of as feeble materials as other men. Our eyes therefore are to be taken off Samſon, and fixed upon God. We are to view Samſon as really an inſtrument in God's hand, as the jawbone was in Samſon's hand, and the one, independent of Almighty power, as unequal

[k] Hebrews xi. 32.

unequal to the effect ſpoken of as the other. — I may add, the above propoſition being agreeable to the more general and ordinary, as well as miraculous and extraordinary operations of God, in his government of the world and church, this will be a ſufficient apology for introducing a diſcourſe on the ſubject, with the words of my text, which are ſo obvious a proof of it. —— In enlarging, I ſhall carefully avoid all abſtract reaſoning, and endeavour to illuſtrate it as a matter of fact,

I. From the hiſtory of the nation of Iſrael;

II. From the general hiſtory of God's Providence; and,

III. From the methods of his grace.

I. From the hiſtory of Iſrael as a nation. — Whilſt a national-body, they were diſtinguiſhed above all the reſt of the world with the divine favour; and it was the deſign alſo of infinite wiſdom, to empty them of the leaſt ſhadow of a ground for ſelf-dependence, and lead them to

to a total reliance upon the Lord their God. With this view, therefore, in his judgments upon Egypt, he did not make uſe of the ſword of Iſrael, but "frogs "and flies were the inſtruments of his "vengeance, and they executed it more "effectually than would an army of ſix "hundred thouſand men." [1] With this view, alſo, he brought Iſrael into difficulties of that nature, that might intimate it was not their own arm or wiſdom ſaved them, but God was their ſalvation. One proof we have in their miraculous paſſage through the Red ſea, though it muſt be acknowledged, the diviſion of the waters was by the immediate hand of God, without the intervention of any inſtrument, unleſs the waving of Moſes's rod over the ſea could be properly termed uſing an inſtrument. — But in thoſe caſes wherein the Lord did make uſe of means, they were of ſuch a kind, as evinced his determination to humble the pride of man, and teach the inſufficiency of the inſtrument itſelf, not the need he ſtood in of it.

[1] Charnock on Providence.

it. When Iſrael went to war, they were forbid the aſſiſtance of horſes and chariots, in which the neighbouring nations confided. On the contrary, they were to be infantry or foot-ſoldiers only, and againſt the mightieſt armies of their enemies. And as often as, in God's ſtrength and way they encountered their adverſaries, they were ſucceſsful. As often as they had recourſe to other methods and confidences, they fell. The prophet Hoſea, accordingly, deſcribing the unfeigned ſorrow he exhorted them to, for their departure from the Lord, introduces Iſrael penitentially reſolving, *Aſhur*, or Aſſyria *ſhall not ſave us*; *we will no more ride upon horſes*; *neither will we any more ſay to the works of our hands, Ye are our gods.* [m] —— The cloſer we conſult the hiſtory of this people, the more we ſhall perceive the power of God manifeſted, by the weakneſs of the means he employed. It was not ſo much by the ſtrength or proweſs of the Iſraelites that they defeated Amalek, as the preſence of the Almighty, ſignified by the holding up

[m] Hoſea xiv. 3.

up of the rod of God in Moſes's hand. When Moſes, through the feebleneſs of age, let down his hand, Amalek prevailed; but Moſes's hand being ſtayed up, Iſrael conquered; and the name of the place was called *Jehovah-niſſi (the Lord is my banner)* [n] both to perpetuate the victory, and the way it was obtained. — The tribes having miraculouſly paſſed Jordan, and entered upon Canaan, were oppoſed by the ſtrong fortifications of Jericho. How were theſe fortifications to be reduced? Let us read the ſcripture account. *Ye ſhall*, ſaid the Lord to Joſhua, *compaſs the city all ye men of war, and go round about the city once: thus ſhalt thou do ſix days. And ſeven prieſts ſhall bear before the ark ſeven trumpets of rams horns: and the ſeventh day, ye ſhall compaſs the city ſeven times, and the prieſts ſhall blow with the trumpets. And it ſhall come to paſs, that when they make a long blaſt with the ram's horn, and when ye hear the ſound of the trumpet, all the people ſhall ſhout with a great ſhout: and the wall of the city ſhall fall down flat,*

[n] Exodus xvii. 15.

and the people ſhall aſcend up, every man ſtraight before him. [o] The event juſtified the prediction, and proved that it was not the might of Iſrael, or ſkill of their commander, but the power of the Lord of Hoſts which rendered them ſuperiour. — The like may be ſaid of the reſt of thoſe victories, wherein Joſhua was their leader. — So, alſo, when Iſrael was oppreſſed in the days of the judges, at one time the Lord raiſed up the left-handed Ehud, to be the means of delivering them from Moab, by the deſtruction of their king. At another time, Shamgar the ſon of Anath ſlew ſix hundred Philiſtines with an ox-goad. [p] At another, Barak, with an inconſiderable army of foot-men, overthrew the numerous hoſt and powerful chariots of Siſera, a defeat that the venerable Deborah, in her ſong, piouſly aſcribes to the Lord. [q] —— But no victory, in this period of the hiſtory of Iſrael, is more remarkable than that of Gideon. Midian had oppreſſed Iſrael ſeven years, and to that degree, that the Iſraelites

[o] Joſhua vi. 3, 4, 5. [p] Judges iii. 20. 31.
[q] Judges v. 2.

Iſraelites were obliged to make *dens and caves, and ſtrong-holds, in the mountains,* for the ſecurity of themſelves and preſervation of their proviſion, from the cruelty and rapine of the Midianites. Their caſe ſeemed deſperate, until God raiſed up Gideon to attempt their deliverance. Gideon himſelf indeed, at firſt, judged their ſituation too hopeleſs to be remedied; and though the Angel of the Lord appeared to encourage him, it was with reluctance and in the night alſo, that he broke down the idolatrous altar Midian had erected in Iſrael. *And ſo it was,* ſaith the ſcripture, *becauſe he feared his father's houſhold, and the men of the city, that he could not do* it *by day, that he did* it *by night.*[r] But Iſrael being in arms to oppoſe Midian, how did the Lord ſave them? Their ſalvation was well repreſented in a dream, one of the men of Iſrael dreamed, *That a cake of barley bread tumbled into the hoſt of Midian, and came unto a tent, and ſmote it that it fell, and overturned it that the tent lay along.* Such was the victory of

[r] Judges vi. 27.

Gideon the ſon of Joaſh, and ſo inadequate the means to the end. When the Iſraelites were aſſembled at Gilead, though a rude, an undiſciplined, and diſcouraged crowd of men, the Lord ſaid unto Gideon, *The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, leſt Iſrael vaunt themſelves againſt me, ſaying, mine own hand hath ſaved me.* Accordingly proclamation was made, "*Whoſoever is fearful and afraid, "let him return and depart.*" And ſo fearful were they, that *twenty-two thouſand returned*, and *there remained* only *ten thouſand.* Yet the people were ſtill too many; they were therefore reduced by another experiment to three hundred, and by them God determined to make Iſrael conquerors over the Midianites and Amalekites, who were *as graſhoppers for multitude.* Let us remark alſo the manner in which this victory was obtained. The three hundred men, before-mentioned, were ordered to be furniſhed with a trumpet in one hand, and an earthen pitcher in the other, and each of the pitchers to contain a burning lamp. They came to the

the camp of Midian by night; and after ſurrounding it, every man blew his trumpet and broke the pitcher, holding the lamp in his left-hand, and ſhouting, *The ſword of the Lord and of Gideon.* This was all. None of them moved out of his place or attacked the enemy; but they ſtood ſtill, and blew the trumpets. And the ſtratagem ſucceeded, becauſe the Lord ſet every man's ſword againſt his fellow, in the hoſt of Midian, ſo that, imagining the army of Gideon had penetrated into the heart of their camp, they miſtook their friends for their foes — every man ſlew the perſon next him — the few ſurvivors fled in the utmoſt confuſion, and became an eaſy prey unto thoſe, whom a little before they had ſo unmercifully enſlaved.[s] —— As we go on in the hiſtory, inſtances of this ſort are ſo frequent, that I ſhall content myſelf with ſelecting ſome of the principal. Such was the victory of David over Goliah. A ſtone thrown from a ſling, by a mere ſtripling, was, under the divine direction, the means of deſtroying a giant,

[s] Judges ch. vii.

whoſe ſpear was as a weaver's beam, and whoſe ſpear's head weighed ſix hundred ſhekels of iron.[t] Again, in the reign of Ahab, Benhadad king of Syria proudly vaunted, "*The duſt of Samaria ſhall* not "*ſuffice for handfuls for all the people* "*that follow me.* So vaſt will my army "be, that in Samaria there is not duſt "enough for each ſoldier to take up an "handful. I will pluck up Samaria by "the roots, and the very ſoles of my "people's feet ſhall remove the duſt there-"of to a diſtant country, that not a "particle will remain."[u] But the proud man did not reflect, while he uttered this bombaſt threatening, that many incidents take place between the putting on and putting off of the harneſs. The Lord defeated him, not by the army of Iſrael, but by *the young men*, the ſervants *of the princes* or governors, *of the provinces.* The amount of the whole army of Ahab was ſeven thouſand, the ſervants of the princes no more than two hundred and thirty-two. On the other hand, Benhadad had, beſides his own, the armies of thirty kings

[t] 1 Sam. xvii. 4. [u] Poole's Synopſis in loc.

kings his allies and dependants; yet the attack of the young men occaſioned ſuch a panic in this numerous hoſt, that Benhadad took to his horſe, and fled without ſtate, amongſt the moſt common of his cavalry. —— Nor was this the laſt victory of Iſrael over this haughty monarch. Irritated but not diſcouraged by his former defeat, Benhadad rallied his forces, in hope that *God was the God of the hills* only, *not the God of the valleys*, and brought into the field next year ſo formidable an array, that Iſrael appeared few and weak, like *two little flocks of kids*, to the troops of Syria which filled the country. But, inconſiderable in themſelves, their victory was ſo complete, that there fell of the Syrians in one day *an hundred thouſand men*, and Benhadad, being taken priſoner, was obliged to ſue for peace in a ſuppliant manner, and upon the king of Iſrael's own terms, criminal as it was judged to be, that the latter ſhould permit ſo abandoned a prince to eſcape out of his hands. [w] — Thus did God ſhew the idolatrous

[w] 1 Kings xx. 20. 29.

latrous Ahab that he is the Lord, every where omnipotent, and therefore alone to be worſhipped: — Thus did he, whoſe own glory is underived and who is the fountain of all honour, juſtly claim to himſelf the entire praiſe of the ſucceſs he beſtowed: — In theſe and other inſtances he has diſplayed the greatneſs of his power, by the feebleneſs of the inſtruments uſed in effecting his deſigns: — And Aſa, king of Judah, in the firſt part of his reign lay under ſo deep a conviction of this doctrine, that (happy had he always done ſo!) he ſought unto the Lord in his diſtreſs, not the phyſicians. When Zabah king of Ethiopia came out againſt him, at the head of a million of ſoldiers and three hundred chariots, inſufficient as was the ſtrength of Judah's five hundred thouſand ſwordsmen and archers, to contend with ſo mighty an armament, *Aſa cried unto the Lord his God, and ſaid,* "*Lord, it is no-*
"*thing with thee to help, whether with*
"*many or with them that have no power:*
"*Help us, O Lord our God, for we reſt*
"*on thee, and in thy name we go againſt*
"*this*

" *this multitude*; *O Lord, thou art our* " *God, let not man prevail againſt* us who " take refuge in thee, and by that means " appear to prevail againſt *thee.*" *And the Lord*, it is added, *ſmote the Ethiopians before Aſa, and before Judah, and the Ethiopians fled.* A prayer preſented in this frame of mind never failed of ſucceſs. —— Let us now turn from the national hiſtory of Iſrael,

II. To the general hiſtory of Providence in the world, and enquire, Whether, through the over-ruling hand of God, " great events do not often proceed from " little cauſes ?" — Here indeed, were I not to confine myſelf, a large field opens. — One perſon will tell you, that being at the laſt extremity of want and perplexity, by ſome plain and obvious circumſtance, the means of relief and ſubſiſtence were pointed out to him, and he marvelled he had never thought of this method before; — another, that expoſed to imminent danger and ready to periſh, after many fruitleſs exertions and at the laſt gaſp of hope, he beheld de-

liverance ſpring from a quarter, whence he leaſt expected it; — a third, that intending to go a certain road, he was diverted from his deſign by one or other apparently trifling matter, and afterwards learned, that thereby he was preſerved from the hands of wicked and unreaſonable men; — a fourth, that he propoſed the indulging himſelf in certain improper entertainments, but buſineſs intervened to prevent; and in the ſequel it appeared that had he gone, the probable iſſue would have been death;[x] — a fifth, that he tried in ſickneſs a variety of coſtly preparations without effect, but found benefit at length from a very ſimple remedy, which unforeſeen to him fell in his way. — Not the unmeaning term *accident*, but the inviſible agency of God is to be regarded

[x] The ſermon being preached on the 5th of November 1777, this reference is more particularly to an *exploſion of gunpowder in Cheſter, Nov.* 5, 1772, which blew up a room containing about an hundred people, aſſembled to ſee an indecent puppet-ſhow, moſt of whom were killed or maimed. Many others intended to have gone, but were prevented by ſome trivial matters, that afterwards they could not but think remarkable.

garded in theſe and the like events. —— The preferment of Joſeph, from the priſon to the government of Egypt, was owing to his ſeemingly caſual interpretation of the dreams, of two of his fellow-priſoners. — The preſervation of Moſes, and his advancement to the notice of Pharaoh's daughter, is to be imputed to his mother's providentially placing him in the ark of bulruſhes, juſt at the inſtant the princeſs came to the river. [y] — The ſafety of David, from the rebellious attempts of his ſon, was the conſequence of the Lord's turning the well-plotted counſel of Ahitophel into fooliſhneſs, and leaving Abſalom to follow the advice of Huſhai, which was covertly intended for his ruin. [z] — Through the information of a little maid, an Iſraelitiſh captive, Naaman the Syrian applied to Eliſha for the cure of his leproſy, and by waſhing in the ſtreams of Jordan (a water of no peculiarly medical virtue) was the cure of his obſtinate diſeaſe completed. [a] — The narrow eſcape of Mordecai, from the deadly machinations of Haman, is to be

[y] Exodus ii. 5. [z] 2 Sam. xvii. 14. [a] 2 Kings v. 2.

attributed to an incident which, previous to the event, every one would have ſuppoſed adventitious. King Ahaſuerus, unable to ſleep, for his amuſement directed the chronicles of his reign to be read. There Mordecai the Jew was recorded to have diſcovered a plot againſt the king's life; in return for which piece of ſervice, he was publickly proclaimed the preſerver of his ſovereign, and Haman mortified with being the inſtrument of conveying this honour to him, at the very inſtant he entered the palace, with a petition to have Mordecai in his power, that he might hang him upon a gallows he had maliciouſly erected for him. [b] — The hiſtory of the church multiplies proofs, wherein the Governor of Zion has wiſely ordained the fulfilment of his own decrees, by methods of which human foreſight could not diſcern the propriety.—And, to come nearer home, that the tranſient affection of Henry VIII. for Anna Boleyn, detached from his allegiance to the See of Rome, a prince whom Rome had ſtiled *Defender of the faith*, and

[b] Eſther ch. vi.

and conduced to the reformation of England from Popery [c] — that a mere overſight reſcued a nation from the horrors of perſecution [d] — that a few inconſiderable

[c] When love could teach a monarch to be wiſe,
And goſpel-light firſt dawn'd from Boleyn's eyes.
GRAY.

[d] This diverting ſtory, as more circumſtantially related by Dr. Maclaine (*Moſheim*'s Eccleſ. Hiſt. Vol. III. p. 384.) is, that Queen Mary being determined to perſecute the Proteſtants in Ireland, nominated Dr. *Cole* a commiſſioner for that purpoſe. The Doctor arriving at Cheſter was waited on by the Mayor, to whom he produced his commiſſion, encloſed in a leathern-box, adding, "*Here is a* "*commiſſion, that ſhall laſh the hereticks of Ireland.*" The good woman of the inn over-hearing this, and being herſelf a Proteſtant, and concerned for *John Edmonds* her brother, who alſo was a Proteſtant and in Dublin, watched her opportunity, and while the Doctor complimented the Mayor down ſtairs, opened the box, took out the commiſſion, and placed inſtead thereof, a ſheet of paper with a *pack of cards* wrapt up therein, and the *knave of clubs* uppermoſt. The Doctor returning, and ſuſpecting nothing, put up the box as formerly. Next day, wind and weather ſerving, he ſailed for Ireland, and landed at Dublin, Oct. 7, 1558. Then coming before the Lord-Deputy and the Privy-Council, he preſented the box, with a ſpeech relating to the contents. The box being opened, that

able fire-ſhips diſperſed the vaſt *Armada* — that an obſcure letter led to the diſcovery of the *Popiſh gunpowder-conſpiracy* — and that the bigotry and perfidy, ſucceeded by the cowardice, of James II. made way for the glorious revolution, are a few of the facts which evince God's care of theſe realms — a few of the evidences of his wiſdom and power, who by cauſes the moſt improbable, can produce the moſt aſtoniſhing effects. — And hath God ſo guided the courſe of his Providence, as to lay man low and exalt himſelf? Where then is the abſurdity of ſuppoſing,

III. That this is an end he propoſes, in the diſpenſations of his grace? —— Doth not the analogy and uniformity of his

that the commiſſion might be read, they found nothing but a *pack of cards* and the *knave of clubs* uppermoſt. A high laugh was raiſed againſt the Doctor, who troubled in his mind returned to England, and obtained another commiſſion, but the wind not favouring his ſecond paſſage to Ireland, news came that the Queen was dead, and the perſecution was prevented. —— Queen Elizabeth was ſo pleaſed with this ſtory, that ſhe ſettled 40l. a year for life, upon the woman of the inn.

his proceedings manifeſt that this is the caſe? The nation of Iſrael was typical of the peculiar and ſpiritual people of God, and their victories emblematical of the chriſtian ſalvation, and illuſtrative of the declaration of God himſelf, that the building up of the church ſhould not be *by might, nor by power, but by* his *Spirit.*[e] Accordingly, our Lord Jeſus Chriſt came into the world not in a pompous manner, to attract followers by dazzling their eyes with his outward magnificence, but in the humble form of a ſervant. He preached the goſpel to the poor; and himſelf and his doctrine were ſo deſpiſed by the great and noble of his country, that they ſaw no beauty or comelineſs in either, nor any reaſon why they ſhould be deſired. His Apoſtles alſo, he did not ſelect from the inſtructed or polite, but choſe Matthew the publican and a few mean fiſhermen, deſtitute of learning and of fame; them he qualified to ſpread his goſpel in the world. True, Paul was a man of deep erudition, brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, yet Paul,

[e] Zech. iv. 6.

Paul, ſpeaking of his gift or capacity for preaching, does not by any means attribute it to his progreſs in human literature, but to God, *by whom he was made an able miniſter of the New Teſtament.*[f] *God* ſays he, *who commanded light to ſhine out of darkneſs, hath ſhined into our hearts, to* give *the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jeſus Chriſt; but we have this treaſure in earthen veſſels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.*[g] *It pleaſed God by the fooliſhneſs of preaching, to ſave them that believe.*[h] —— Indeed the Lord is often pleaſed to hide pride from man, and empty his miniſters of ſelf-ſufficiency, by ordering it ſo ſometimes, that when they have had great freedom and comfort in ſpeaking the word, no wiſhed-for ſucceſs of their labours enſued; — on the other hand, when ſtraitened to that degree, that they thought ſo confuſed and unanimated a diſcourſe would be loſt upon their hearers, time has diſcovered that ſermon to have been made, the power of God unto ſalvation. —— And what ſhall we ſay

[f] 2 Cor. iii. 6. [g] 2 Cor. iv. 6. [h] 1 Cor. i. 21.

ſay to a far from uncommon fact, that miniſters of extenſive genius, knowledge and eloquence, are very unſucceſsful in the Lord's harveſt, while preachers of meaner talents, plainer gifts, and fewer advantages, are inſtruments of converting many ſouls to the obedience of Chriſt? — But what confirms the ſentiment more than all is, that the word is ſtatedly preached —— the moſt awful truths are ſpoken and urged, from time to time and for many years — things are put in one and another light, ſo as to be moſt ſtriking — miniſters preſs them with all the force and energy they are able — and yet ſinners continue faſt aſleep in ſin. Does not this prove the feebleneſs of the external means, in themſelves only conſidered; and that unleſs God extend his almighty arm to awaken the ſoul, the voice of his miniſters, and even of the Bible, cannot call loud enough to reach the heart of an unconverted ſinner. But let the grace of God be exerted with the word, and mark the effect! The word comes *not in word only, but* alſo *in power, and in the Holy Ghoſt, and with*

with much aſſurance[i] of its majeſty and veracity — the ſinner hears the voice of God therein, and is alarmed for the error of his paſt ways — he wonders he could remain ſo long ſtupid and unconcerned — he forſakes the practices of iniquity, believes on the Son of God, walks with holy feet in the commandments of the Lord, and is a different perſon from what he ever was in his life before. — To what ſhall we aſcribe this change? — To anſwer, "The arguments for "religion were ſo juſt, ſo ſtrong, that "the ſinner could no longer reſiſt their "force," only leads to another queſtion, "As religion is at all times equally im-"portant, why did not the ſame juſt "and ſtrong arguments make the ſame "impreſſion before, as they do now?"— To ſay, "The man is *better diſpoſed* for "conſidering the word, now than for-"merly," is to ſay nothing; the queſtion returns, "What produced a better diſ-"poſition in him now than years ago?" — To reply, "Things happened now, to "ſtrike him in a more forcible light," is

[i] 1 Theſſ. i. 5.

is to impute the change to the blind influence of chance. — To tell us, "Perhaps Providence ordered his ſituation and circumſtances ſo as, with the common and general perſuaſions of grace, to engage his attention to the inſtructions ſet before him," is to give up the point, and confeſs the neceſſity of the poſitive interpoſition of the Almighty, to overcome the man's former averſion, and effectually fix his attention, to the things that concern his everlaſting peace. There is no greater difficulty in maintaining, with the ſcripture, the abſolute impotence of all ſubordinate means, unleſs enforced by the efficacious operations of divine grace upon the heart. The very idea of prayer, for a bleſſing on the means, preſuppoſes their total weakneſs, unaccompanied by theſe operations, and that *no fleſh ſhould glory in God's preſence*, but he who glories, as a real chriſtian, ought to *glory in the Lord Jeſus only, who of God is made unto us wiſdom, righteouſneſs, ſanctification, and redemption.* [k]

On

[k] 1 Cor. i. 29, 30.

On the whole, if the Lord does great things by ſmall means, we learn hence,

1. That God's people ought not to give up hope, if their own affairs, or the affairs of the church, are very diſtreſſing. — For all things are of God, the government of all in his hand, let them be ever ſo dark and diſmal. He hath diſplayed his love to your better part, in that he hath reconciled you to himſelf by Jeſus Chriſt; he hath diſplayed his regard for his church, by purchaſing it with his own blood; there is no caſe ſo deſperate but he can obviate it, nor any inſtrument ſo feeble, but his ſtrength can make it ſubſervient to his own gracious purpoſes. Our main concern, therefore, in all ſtraits and difficulties, is to look to him, to wait on him, to hope in his mercy; and ſhould our trials encreaſe inſtead of diminiſh, yet to lie ſubmiſſively at his feet, with the dutiful reſolution of Job, *Though he ſlay me, yet will I truſt in him.*[1] He that thus truſteth in the Lord ſhall never be moved. Though perplexed you ſhall not

[1] Job xiii. 15.

not deſpair — though caſt down you ſhall not be deſtroyed — though overwhelmed in affliction you ſhall emerge out of it, and in due time reap if you faint not. This ſhould, alſo, encourage the children of Zion, to cry on her account to Zion's king, *Is not the Lord in Zion? Is not her king in her?* [m] — to *give him no reſt, until the righteouſneſs thereof go forth as brightneſs, and the ſalvation thereof as the lamp that burneth*; [n] at the ſame time, that the truth inculcated in our text teaches us alſo,

2. Not to deſpiſe the ſmalleſt means, which may be conducive to the glory of God, and the good of his church. —— Humble ſouls, through a mixture of unbelief with the grace reſident in them, are ſometimes ready to ſay, "I am ca- "pable of ſo little ſervice in the church, "that I conſider myſelf as an unprofit- "able branch, and fear to attempt any "thing for its benefit." —— Should not the inference rather be, "I am, through "mercy, capable of a little, therefore "my duty is faithfully to diſcharge that "little?"

[m] Jer. viii. 19. [n] Iſaiah xii. 1.

" little ?" — Chriſt Jeſus took notice of the widow's mite, and entered Jeruſalem in a lowly form, riding on a colt the foal of an aſs. He deſpiſeth not the day of ſmall things. If we cannot then do all the good we would, let us ſtrive to do all the good we can, in the ſtation allotted to us, and pray to God to enlarge our ſphere of uſefulneſs. How quickly may his ſtrength be made perfect in our weakneſs ! Our prayers and practice ought, therefore, to go hand in hand. As the Lord uſually works by inſtruments though feeble, to omit duty upon any pretence or even diſcouragement whatſoever, is to tempt the Lord, and is a diſorder he will convince us of, before he appears to countenance the requeſts we put up to him. Once more,

3. If the Lord humbles man and exalts his own grace, in the ſalvation of ſinners, then we learn, by what rules to judge of the truth of religion within us. — Have we any religion, or have we none ? — Has our religion the ſtamp of the goſpel on it ? Judge of it by the following marks. Does it reſt in rites or forms

forms — plume itſelf upon external performances — or aſcribe the honour of ſalvation to human ſtrength, wiſdom or virtue? This is not to worſhip God but ourſelves — to fall down before the lifeleſs labour of our own hands — to burn incenſe to an idol of our own formation — a puppet, whoſe outward ſhew is all the religion it poſſeſſes — whoſe inward movements are nothing better than pride, and the natural impulſe of ſelf-love — to derive ſatisfaction and hope from this mimickry of religion, is to rob God of the glory due unto his name, to offer an affront to Jeſus the alone Saviour, and in the moſt pernicious extreme to deceive our own ſouls.—But is our religion deep, ſerious, and ſearching — entering into the heart — emptying it of ſelf-confidence and dependance — leading to the Lord Jehovah, in whom is righteouſneſs and ſtrength — to glory in the croſs of Chriſt — to give the entire praiſe of ſalvation to God, and live as in his preſence? So ſcripture delineates the religion of the Bible. May grace inſtruct us experimentally in its meaning and bleſſedneſs,

neſs, that believing we may know it to be to us, the power and wiſdom of God! — Still if ſinners remain unaffected, one proof more will be afforded, of the inability of the word alone to penetrate the ſeared conſcience, and one proof more of human depravity remitted to the court of heaven, to teſtify that the warnings of death and judgment were duly delivered, and, as uſual, madly trampled on. —— Lord, take to thyſelf now, thy great power and reign — ſubdue the rebellious and obſtinate — let thy kingdom come, and thy will be done as it is in heaven — let the kingdoms, hitherto of the world only, become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Anointed, that thy way may be known upon earth, thy ſaving health unto all nations, that the people may praiſe thee, that all the people may praiſe thee! Amen!

DIS-

DISCOURSE XV.

Ruth's piety.

RUTH i. 16.

And Ruth ſaid, " *Intreat me not to leave*
" *thee,* or *to return from following after*
" *thee: for whither thou goeſt, I will*
" *go; and where thou lodgeſt, I will*
" *lodge: thy people ſhall be my people,*
" *and thy God my God.*"

EVERY thing in this world had a beginning, and great things have often proceeded from ſmall beginnings. To abaſe the pride of birth, and ſtamp vanity on human greatneſs, the Sovereign of the world brings down the high and exalts the low, *he raiſeth up the poor out of the duſt,* and *lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; that he may ſet* him *with princes,* even *with the princes of*

his people. [o] Hence great men have deſcended from very obſcure parents, and many a brave general, a wiſe counſellor, a famous ſcholar been born in a cottage. Nor is this circumſtance a diſgrace to the hero, the ſtateſman, the man of erudition: Of one blood God made all nations upon the face of the earth; no man is naturally of an higher rank than another; all were formed of the ſelf-ſame clay; all are ſubject to the ſame wants and infirmities; and all will ere long ſay alike *to corruption, Thou art my father, and to the worm, Thou art my mother and my ſiſter.* [p] —— If theſe conſiderations had their due force on the mind, they would infallibly lower the opinion individuals ſo fondly entertain, of the dignity and antiquity of their families; and leſt men of elevated ſituations ſhould think themſelves of a ſuperiour order in the creation, and deſpiſe others as of a coarſer make, the ſcripture particularly deſcribes the original meanneſs of ſome of its moſt renowned heroes, ſaying, concerning David for inſtance, *He choſe David his*

[o] Pſalm cxiii. 7, 8. [p] Job xvii. 14.

his ſervant and took him — from whence? —— *from the ſheep-folds.* — *From following the ewes great with young, he brought him to feed Jacob his people, and Iſrael his inheritance.* [q] The deſcent of David is alſo left upon record, at once to gratify an harmleſs and ſometimes laudable curioſity we have, of knowing anecdotes relating to the families of celebrated characters, and to make appear, what little worldly grandeur his anceſtors had to boaſt of, while (that which was more valuable) their plainneſs and piety cannot claim too much of our regard. — The hiſtory of his family begins in this book. — During the adminiſtration of the judges, but the preciſe time unknown, there was a grievous famine in the land of Iſrael; and ſo diſtreſſed were the poor for food, that they forſook their own country, to ſeek a ſubſiſtence among the adjacent heathen nations. Elimelech alſo, a man of the town of Bethlehem Judah, unbelievingly apprehenſive of diſtreſs rather than immediately feeling it, went to ſojourn in the country of Moab, he and Naomi his

[q] Pſalm lxxviii. 70, 71.

wife, and two ſons Mahlon and Chilion. There Elimelech died; and his ſons, in hopes of a better living than at home (and probably not diſliking the impure cuſtoms of the Moabites) determined to ſettle there; for which purpoſe they took them wives of the daughters of Moab, by name Orpah and Ruth; but inſtead of proſperity, moſt of their property was ſpent, and in ten years time both died, without any ſurviving iſſue by their wives, and leaving Naomi their mother deſtitute, in a ſtrange land. Her grief for her loſs, we may conclude, was very pungent. "*Call me not Naomi*, that is *beau-*"*tiful*, ſays ſhe, *but call me Mara*, that "is *bitterneſs*, *for the Almighty hath dealt* "*very bitterly with me.*" She reſolved however to return home, as if contritely ſenſible, that in her afflictions the Lord had teſtified againſt the fault (in which poſſibly ſhe took too active a part) of forſaking, for worldly conſiderations, her own people amongſt whom the true God was acknowledged, to reſide in Moab where he was denied. But the queſtion was, Whether her daughters in law would accom-

accompany her, or abide with their own kindred? — Would they go with Naomi poor as ſhe was? — Would they go at all hazards, and ſerve Iſrael's God? She tried them both. At firſt ſhe propoſed going alone, and ſpoke as if ſhe would adviſe them to ſtay where they were; but both ſhewed her ſo much complaiſance, that they profeſſed they would not let her return alone. — "*Surely we will re-*"*turn with thee unto thy people*," they ſay. But when ſhe fairly told them, that there was but a ſmall proſpect of getting rich or getting huſbands, by going along with her, *Orpah* took the hint and *kiſſed her — but Ruth cleave unto her. — Orpah kiſſed her!* A picture of worldly affection! She fell upon Naomi's neck — wept aloud — was heartily grieved at leaving ſo kind a mother-in-law — ſhould always think of and reſpect her — paid her many fine compliments — and put up many prayers alſo, for words and tears are cheap on ſuch occaſions — yet ſhe would run no riſque to prove her friendſhip — ſhe loved her country, and her country gods — and to go to ſo religious a people as Iſ-

rael, and be poor alſo, was intolerable — ſo ſhe ſtaid in Moab. Well, ſaid Naomi to the other daughter, "*Behold, thy ſiſter is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy ſiſter-in-law.* She hath renounced me, and is no more my daughter; I cannot call her by ſo tender a name. But wilt thou alſo go? Will it not be better for thee?" — "No," anſwered Ruth, "*Intreat me not to leave thee,* or *to return from following after thee: for whither thou goeſt, I will go; and where thou lodgeſt, I will lodge: thy people ſhall be my people, and thy God my God.*" In which profeſſion, and her conſequent practice, we are called upon to admire her piety——towards Naomi, and towards God.—— In the

I. Of theſe, ſhe is an example rarely met with;[r] that a young woman brought up in heatheniſm, a beautiful young woman alſo, who might have recommended herſelf

[r] Notes to an elegant Tranſlation of Cicero's *Lælius*, or an Eſſay on Friendſhip, by W. Melmoth, Eſq.

herſelf in the place of her nativity, yet for the affection ſhe bore to an unfortunate old woman, the mother of her late huſband, forſook her country and all its connections, to ſhare her lot with the aged matron; and though poverty, widowhood, and hard labour were the utmoſt return ſhe could reaſonably expect, was willing to forego her own eaſe and advancement, being contented to work for her aged mother-in-law, and help her to drag out the poor remains of life, with a degree of comfort. What a reproach is this Moabiteſs to diſobedient children, who by their conduct grieve, or otherwiſe cruelly treat their own natural parents! *Honour thy father and thy mother*, ſaith the firſt command of the ſecond table, *that thy days may be long, in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.*[3] The promiſe is poſitive, that temporal bleſſings ſhall be annexed to the obedience of this precept; and the fulfilment is as remarkably verified by ſcripture and experience. The prophet Jeremiah relates, that the deſcendants of Rechab were commanded

[3] Exodus xx. 12.

by Jonadab their immediate anceſtor, for particular reaſons, not to drink wine, build houſes, ſow ſeed, or plant vineyards; and for their obedience herein (unreaſonable as many children would think the injunction) the Lord declared he would bleſs them with long life and proſperity, even whilſt the reſt of the Jewiſh nation was ſcattered, and carried into captivity.[t] — And the hiſtory of the manner in which the divine Providence favoured Ruth, for the regard ſhewn to Naomi, is not leſs pleaſing. — Let us read it. — Having walked many weary ſteps, they arrived at Bethlehem in that degree of indigence, that Naomi was the aſtoniſhment of her former acquaintance, and it being the beginning of the barley-harveſt, Ruth propoſed to go and glean for their joint ſupport, wherever ſhe could obtain permiſſion. She went, and (ſee how imperceptibly the hand of God works!) ſhe was directed to the field of Boaz, a man of wealth and Elimelech's diſtant relation, though Naomi, in her preſent poverty, was aſhamed to claim kindred with him. It

[t] Jeremiah xxxv. 19.

It happened alſo, that Boaz came into the field while ſhe was there; and ſcarcely had he, in a pious manner, ſaluted his reapers, and received the like return from them, but he was captivated with the appearance of Ruth, and induced to make further enquiry concerning her. Learning ſhe was the virtuous daughter-in-law of Naomi, whoſe praiſe had ſpread through the city, he ſpoke kindly unto her, encouraged her to ſtay by his maidens, and partake of the food provided for his ſervants, yea prevented her baſhfulneſs, by diſtributing to her with his own hand. And the bluſh of humble gratitude, occaſioned by this unexpected act of condeſcenſion, ſo heightened the features of Ruth, that Boaz entertained a liking for her, which by further intercourſe improved into a tender affection, ſo that he made her his lawful wife; and this ſtranger, who thus ventured her all, found a ſpeedy and ample reward, while Orpah is ſpoken of no more; yea, ſtill farther to honour her, and teach us that the Gentiles would not be excluded from the privileges of the goſpel, this Moabiteſs is enrolled by

name, as the great grandmother of king David, and one of thoſe anceſtors, *of whom, as concerning the fleſh, Chriſt* came, *who is over all, God bleſſed for ever. Amen* [u] — I will not conceal it, however, that ſome perſons accuſe her of having acted in the affair, hardly conſiſtent with the rules of ſtrict modeſty, at leaſt of prudence; for let the utmoſt be objected, it cannot fairly amount to more than the latter. If the ſacred hiſtorian, who might have ſuppreſſed this part of the ſtory, has faithfully related it, where is the candour of ſuppoſing more than is ſet down? There is this apology to be given alſo, that the ſimplicity of thoſe times ſuſpected no harm in many things, which modern refinements, often founded upon indelicacy of ſentiment, reckon indecent. The probable opinion in ſhort is, that Elimelech when he went abroad, ſold his eſtate, or mortgaged it for the value; that Elimelech and his heirs being dead therefore, and their widows reduced, it became a kind of duty in Boaz, in caſe no nearer kinſman was ſo diſpoſed, to redeem

[u] Rom. ix. 5.

deem the poſſeſſion, and by marrying the widow of the ſurviving heir, keep up the name of the family.[w] The notice he took of Ruth naturally ſuggeſted to Naomi, that, being a ſingle man, he would perhaps comply with both duties; and the event proved that ſhe was right, and that Boaz was not ſhocked at the manner, in which the intimation was given him.[x]

 — Thus

[w] Lev. xxv. 25. Deut. xxv. 5.

[x] *All the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman*, ſaith he to Ruth at this interview; which virtue was the more remarkable, as the Moabitiſh women were greatly addicted to lewdneſs. Numb. xxv. —To this it muſt be in juſtice added, that there would have been greater ground for the cruel imputation of immodeſty, and of her enſnaring him into a criminal amour, if ſhe had engaged him, apart from his people, in the day time; and what *impudence*, &c. would ill-nature have ſuggeſted, could ſhe have had face enough to offer the petition ſhe did, in open day-light?—Upon the whole, allowing for the difference of times and manners, little if any thing can be urged againſt her conduct, either on the ſcore of delicacy or prudence; to confirm which it muſt be obſerved, that the phraſe Ruth iii. 9. *ſpread thy ſkirt* (literally, *thy wing*) *over thine handmaid*, compared with the uſe of the ſame phraſe Ezek. xvi. 9. diſcovers its common

—— Thus far we regard Ruth, as an amiable pattern of filial duty, and admire the traces of infinite wiſdom, in raiſing her up ſo ample a recompence: —— We are next to conſider her,

II. As a proſelyte to the true religion, and taking the God of Iſrael for *her God.* —— This leads us to recommend her to your notice, not merely as a virtuous, but a pious, a godly woman, and to ſet before you ſuch weighty arguments, as may, with the divine bleſſing, engage you to make the ſame choice. —— No doubt Ruth had heard of the true God, in the family of Elimelech and Naomi — no doubt ſhe diſcerned the ſuperiour excellence of the true religion, contraſted with the obſcene and abominable rites of *Chemoſh*[y] — no doubt ſhe was perſuaded, that the gods of the heathens were idols, and the Lord, God alone. — *Under his wings ſhe*

common acceptation to be no more than this, "*Take* "*me under thy protection, by making me thy wife;*" a remark that obviates the moſt plauſible objection to this part of the ſtory.

[y] Num. xxi. 29. 1 Kings xi. 7.

ſhe came to truſt, therefore. And if in the comparative darkneſs of the Old-Teſtament diſpenſation, there was that attractive luſtre, which ſo prevalently influenced the mind of this young woman, to act contrary to the prejudices of her education, and the received notions of her country, how much more are we indebted to God for his bleſſed goſpel, through which medium enlightened ſouls do, in a ſenſe, *behold with open face the glory of the Lord!*[z] — In recommending the choice of Ruth to your regard, therefore, it will be proper to lay before you, in the

1. Place, How able God is to do you good — able to do for you, more abundantly than you can aſk or think — able to make you infinitely bleſſed. —— If God is not able to conſtitute you happy, we may aſk, Who is? — People covet the friendſhip of the rich and powerful, from an opinion of their capacity to aſſiſt, when neceſſity calls for the exerciſe of their friendſhip. Is not the God then, in whom we live, and move, and have our being, equal to all this? Which made the moſt bene-

[z] 2 Cor. iii. 18.

beneficial choice, Orpah or Ruth? Alas! that ſo very few eſteem his favour *in whom is life, and that life the light of men,*[a] in every ſenſe of the word! God is able to pour that joy and peace, that pleaſure and conſolation into your hearts, that were you to drain all the ſupplies of nature, they could not afford you. A man may poſſeſs an outward competency, and yet be in his mind very uneaſy, diſcontented and diſſatisfied. 'Tis a maxim generally admitted, that only in the proper balance and temperature of the ſoul, conſiſts true felicity. Extremes even of pleaſure over-burden the inclination, and degenerate into diſguſt. But the peace of God *paſſeth all underſtanding*;[b] — ſo ſatisfying is it, that all who have felt it will teſtify, it is enough — that poor and miſerable in the world's eſteem, the little a righteous man hath, is better than the treaſures of many wicked. If you have God for your God, you will have the beſt portion — have communion with him in prayer, reading, meditation, hearing the word — have him to ſmile upon you, com-

[a] John i. 4. [b] Phil. iv. 7.

comfort your hearts, be your guide, guardian and defence — have liberty of acceſs to the throne of grace, to mention all your wants, to call him Abba Father, to believe that all things work together for your good, and from this eminence of ſituation to ſtand calmly, take an enlarged view of his proceedings, and ſee every providential dealing concurring to promote your beſt intereſts, though at preſent perhaps diſtreſſing. No difficulty ſo vaſt and intricate, but God can enable you to ſurmount — no depth of affliction but his arm reaches to — nor can any thing harm you, if you be followers of that which is good. Satan may terrify and the world frown, but he who ſitteth in the heavens ſhall laugh at them, and confound their devices; ſtill ſafe and bleſſed are the people, whoſe God is the Lord. —— Nor is his power confined to this world. He is able to ſave to the uttermoſt — to redeem from the grave and from hell — to tranſlate the ſoul to the regions of peace above — above, where there is fulneſs of joy — to his right hand, where dwell pleaſures for evermore.

Sure,

Surely, if you ſtand in need of an able friend, you can find none ſo ſuitable as God, who has the power of rendering any of his creatures ſubſervient to your benefit, and is himſelf an inexhauſtible ſource of comfort. —— What a reſtleſs anxiety do we behold after ſublunary good — an anxiety, the very reſtleſſneſs of which betrays the mortifying ſecret, that let the purſuers catch much and more of temporal delight, there is not that ſatisfaction involved in it, which can make them as happy as they wiſh to be! What folly then, that they do not look higher than this ſyſtem of corruption, and derive their ſatisfaction from him who formed the ſoul, is intimately acquainted with all its faculties, and of courſe, knows how to adapt his conſolations, ſo as to yield the moſt ſolid entertainment to the mind! How many the evils our fleſh is heir to, in which the ableſt exertions of human friendſhip confeſs, "Here we have no power!" What ſimplicity then to neglect him, who has all poſſible contingencies in his hand, and with whom is the due ordering and management

nagement of every poſſible diſtreſs! The chriſtian inventory comprizes a collection of mercies, which admits of no addition. *All things are yours*, ſaith the Apoſtle, *and ye are Chriſt's, and Chriſt is God's.* [c] — If ſin and Satan can endow you with a poſſeſſion of this vaſt extent, then let them be your gods, and yield them obedience. But if while they ſoothe, they at the ſame time ſting the ſoul, and if, on the other hand, the Lord is God, the certain, the infallible ſupport and ſafety of his people, then your true wiſdom is to follow him, and make him your refuge. — As a farther encouragement to which, let me call before your minds,

2. The amplitude of the divine mercy — the kindneſs of his heart, toward thoſe who return to him. — May I hope that I ſpeak to ſome, whoſe wiſh, whoſe moſt earneſt wiſh amounts to this, that God may be their God? If it is at all your deſire, it is your deſire above the enjoyment of every created excellence, and no ſubject ſo agreeable to you as to be told, that God is more ready to receive you than

[c] 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23.

than you are to come to him; and that if this had not been the fact, you would not have at all returned to him. The affection of the father of the prodigal ſon, expreſſed by his running to meet the repenting profligate, is but a very diſtant reſemblance of the yearnings of God's paternal heart, to ſinners who are inclined to ſeek him. So complacently does he look upon them, that he has given, not one or two only, but a multitude, of promiſes to aſſure them, that *whoſoever calleth on the name of the Lord ſhall be ſaved.* [d] — Nor is this encouragement a ſubject of mere promiſe, but further to ſtrengthen it, God has condeſcended to ſwear alſo, that there ſhall be *ſtrong conſolation* to them *who fly for refuge, to lay hold of the hope ſet before them* [e] in the goſpel; and if we put ſuch a degree of confidence, in the words of a man whom we eſteem, but who, we dare not abſolutely aſſert, may not deceive us, why will we not truſt God, who cannot deny himſelf? —— Yet more, he has given his only begotten Son to die, that ſinners might

[d] Rom. x. 13. [e] Heb. vi. 18.

might be ſaved, the promiſes eſtabliſhed, and ſaints comforted. *All the promiſes of God are in Chriſt yea, and in him Amen,* [f] ſealed, confirmed, ratified ſo as to be irrevocable; that *whoſoever believeth in him ſhould not periſh, but have eternal life.* [g] — Moreover, God has ſent his goſpel into the world, ordered it to be preached, in all its freedom and fulneſs, unto every rational creature, as the means of collecting ſinners, and bringing them openly among the number of his children; by virtue of which authority we invite you to the chriſtian feaſt, ſaying, *Come, for all things are now ready:* yea we would, by the ſtrongeſt motives of the goſpel, *compel* you *to come in,* while *yet there is room.* [h] — And not only does the Spirit of God animate you, in his word, but the *bride,* the church of God, ſays, *Let him that is athirſt come, and whoſoever will let him take of the water of life freely.* [i] — Conſult the

[f] 2 Cor. i. 20. [g] John iii. 15. [h] Luke xiv. 17. 22.

[i] "This does not *ſo much* regard the character "of the perſon, that may take of the water of "life, as the *free manner* in which he may take "it: ſo the Jews are wont to expreſs themſelves, "when

the experience of God's people formerly — aſk them who are now living, and they will all to a man teſtify, "The "Lord promiſes largely, and performs "faithfully. — Enabled by his grace, we "took him at his word; we ventured our "moſt weighty concerns on him, and found "him to be a God merciful and gracious, "ſlow to anger and of great kindneſs, "abundant in goodneſs and in truth. — "Hitherto hath he helped us. —— We "would not exchange our portion for mines "of gold and ſilver — for all the trea- "ſures of the earth; and what we now "experience is but little to what we ex- "pect. There is more — more — more — "for ever!" —— 'Tis unfair that they who never tried, never entered into God's ſervice,

"when they would ſignify the liberty that might "be uſed, or the free way in which any thing "might be taken, particularly when ſpeaking of "the law, and the things of it, *Whoſoever has a "mind to take, let him come and take,* as it is ſaid, "Iſaiah lv. 1. Ho *every one that thirſteth,* &c. that "is, *he is free to take, he is welcome to it*; which "paſſage referred to, is thus paraphraſed by the "Targumiſt, Ho, *whoſoever will* learn, *let him "come* and learn." — Dr. Gill on Rev. xxii. 17.

ſervice, ſhould call him an hard maſter. They do not know what he is. Such as have paſſed years under the yoke of Chriſt, will witneſs, that *his commandments are not grievous*; [k] and if you put the matter to your perſonal proof, you will find no reaſon to be aſhamed of your hope in him. —— To this ability and willingneſs of God, muſt be added, alſo,

3, The unchangeableneſs of his regard, for them who make him their choice. — Human friendſhips are remarkable for nothing more than their fickleneſs. The approbation and diſlike of mankind are ſo capricious, that the friend of to-day may be an enemy to-morrow. A man is often made *an offender for a word*, [l] and umbrage taken at ſome unapprehended foible, ſome inadvertent word or action, which was not meant, or imagined capable of producing an affront. But we have a ſympathiſing High Prieſt, who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Doubtleſs God hates ſin as much, yea more, in his own people than others, and will, by his chaſtening hand, bring them

[k] 1 John v. 3. [l] Iſaiah xxxix. 21.

them to bitter repentance for their faults; yet the very reaſon they are *chaſtened of the Lord* is, *that they ſhould not be condemned with the world*,[m] and a proof that they ſhall not finally periſh, nor will their God caſt them off utterly.—Again, thoſe perſons who careſs us in the fulneſs of proſperity, when we ſolicit their aſſiſtance may draw back, may look ſhy upon us, may totally diſregard us, and there are certain limits to human attachments, which perhaps they hardly ever exceed. But God *hath ſaid, I will not, I will not leave thee, I will never, never, never, forſake thee*,[n] as the original forcibly runs. He is invariably the ſame, in adverſity as in proſperity, in ſickneſs as in health. A change of ſituation makes no alteration in his love. The day of adverſity, on the contrary, is frequently the ſeaſon, wherein his ſaints are moſt diſtinguiſhed, as the favourites of heaven. Accordingly the holy Pſalmiſt, in the evening of life ſumming up God's goodneſs, declares, *I have been young and* now *am old, yet have I not ſeen the righteous forſaken.*[o]—At all events,

[m] 1 Cor. xi. 32. [n] Heb. xiii. 5. [o] Pſalm xxxvii. 25.

events, there is this imperfection attending the things of the world—our friends muſt die, and earthly comforts fade; but God liveth for ever; and Jeſus hath ſaid, *Becauſe I live, ye ſhall live alſo.*[p]——Even death which divides the cloſeſt connections, which ſeparates the ſoul from the body, and the wicked from all their hopes, unites the chriſtian more intimately to his God;——Death, which conveys the ſinner to the infernal lake, launches the believer into the ocean of everlaſting love. Thus God will be our *ſtrength* when *fleſh and heart fail*, and will be alſo *our portion for ever.* Are not theſe aſſurances ſufficient to move us to reply, *Whom have I in heaven but thee?* There is *none upon earth that I deſire beſides thee?*[q] Could I liſten to the breathings of your ſouls, after this deſcription, ſhould I not hear the penitent ſigh heaved deeply from the contrite heart, "Ah! what a fool "have I been! What an enemy to God "and myſelf! How perverſly have I "inſulted the divine forbearance! I have "preferred any and every vanity, to the "chief,

[p] John xiv. 19. [q] Pſalm lxxiii. 25.

" chief, the only bleſſedneſs?" O! attend to the impreſſion made upon you. —Neglect it not.—As you value your ſouls' eternal ſafety, pray that it may not ſlip off your minds.—Let not the admonitions of conſcience and of the word of God be loſt upon you; nor let Satan or unbelief perſuade you, that mercy will not now be ſhewn. Proſtrate before God's throne confeſs your unworthineſs.—In humble hope look up, for repentance and forgiveneſs.——The broken cries of the deſtitute God hears, and will not deſpiſe their prayer. Jeſus is *meek and lowly in heart; and ye ſhall find reſt to your ſouls.*[r] Let me be permitted to add,

4. For quickening you to ſtedfaſtneſs in this awful concern, and for their conviction, who heſitate or perſiſt againſt ſo glorious a choice, that *one thing is needful.*[s]——Godlineſs, as it is advantageous on the one hand, is abſolutely neceſſary on the other. If ye cannot be perſuaded to walk with God, aſk yourſelves at leaſt, What will you do without him? If Jeſus be not your advocate, who will undertake

[r] Mat. xi. 29. [s] Luke x. 42.

undertake for you? No alternative ſubſiſts between being the friends or enemies of the Moſt High, nor any medium between *the gift of God* which *is eternal life*, and the *wages of ſin* which *is death.*[s] Hence then ariſes the important enquiry, "Are we for Chriſt or againſt him?" Pleaſure ſmiles, the world allures, and the heart, too charitable to itſelf, hopeth all things, and puts off the impartial ſcrutiny, wherein lies its principal buſineſs. — But what will the falſe peace avail before the brightneſs of his coming, who will ſit in judgment upon the world, who will try every man's work, of what ſort it is, and make a difference *between the righteous and the wicked, between him that ſerveth God, and him that ſerveth him not?*[t] *Theſe ſhall go away into everlaſting puniſhment; but the righteous into life eternal.*[u] As then, we look for and expect that day, *what manner of perſons ought* we *to be in* all *holy converſation and godlineſs?*[w] *He that getteth wiſdom, loveth his own ſoul: He that keepeth underſtanding ſhall find good.*[x]

[s] Rom. vi. 23. [t] Mal. iii. 18. [u] Mat. xxv. 41.
[w] 2 Pet. iii. 11. [x] Prov. xix. 8.

DISCOURSE XVI.

Thou art the man.

2 SAMUEL xii. 7.

And Nathan ſaid unto David, "*Thou* "art *the man.*" ——

IT is an evidence of the impartiality, and conſequently veracity, of the ſcripture-hiſtory, that in deſcribing the characters of good men, while it diſplays their excellencies, it does not palliate or gloſs over their errors and imperfections. —— God might, if he had thought fit, have guided the pen of inſpiration ſo, that their faults ſhould have been blotted out from the remembrance of man; but it is a mark of the fidelity of the Bible-hiſtorians, ſuperiour to all others, that with the moſt unbiaſſed and ſcrupulous exactneſs, they tell the *whole truth.*

But

But there is more to be deduced from this obſervation. The God of infinite wiſdom ſuffered the failings and ſins of good people, to be recorded in the Bible, that we may draw inſtruction from them — inſtruction, not to leſſen our horrour of ſin, becauſe ſome of God's children have deviated from the path of duty, but that, warned by the falls of eminent ſaints, we may remember our footing is not more ſecure than theirs, and therefore, that we ought not to indulge an opinion of our own ſtrength, or fortitude againſt temptation, but take heed leſt we alſo fall. —— David was called *the man after God's own heart*, and *his ſervant David*, and yet, thus dignified by the notice of heaven, ſome actions of his life diſcovered, how liable the beſt of men, if left to themſelves, are to follow the ways of their own hearts. —— As a particular token of reſpect, David was raiſed from the ſheepfold to the throne, and exalted to be king over Judah and Iſrael. Thus conſtituted the head of a great nation, therefore, he ought to have been the father and guardian of his peo-

ple, a defender of the liberty and property of every one of his ſubjects. But when too much power is thrown into the hands of a feeble mortal — when ſovereigns arrive to that pitch of ſelf-importance, as to think themſelves not accountable for their conduct, tis hard to tell to what lengths, their unbridled paſſions may carry them. In the former chapter David is pictured, not as the king but the tyrant, not as the righteous governour, but the mercileſs robber. — Let us read the narration with trembling. — The army was in the field, but David in the city. Whether this was acceſſary to his fault, or the direct and natural cauſe thereof, I will not take upon me to determine. Perhaps it was right, that he ſhould take care of the adminiſtration of affairs at home, while his generals were fighting abroad — perhaps he was viciouſly indulging himſelf in the eaſe and ſoftneſs of the palace, whilſt the hardy ſoldier was expoſing his life, for the good of his country; ſo it was however, that being in the city, he *aroſe* one evening *from off his bed, and walked upon the* flat *roof*

of

of the king's houſe. It does not appear that he had any thing bad in view thus far — it may be even ſuppoſed that he went up with a good deſign, to refreſh himſelf in the coolneſs of the evening, and at the ſame time meditate on the things which are excellent. But to teach us, that we can never be too much on our guard — that the beſt of our frames, the moſt devout of our moments, have need to be watched over as carefully as the worſt, David was, in this retirement, aſſaulted by a moſt dreadful temptation, — and David fell. —— From the roof of his houſe, he beheld a woman waſhing herſelf — and the woman was very beautiful to look upon — and David ſent and enquired after the woman — and one ſaid, " *Is not this Bathſheba, the daugh-* " *ter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the* " *Hittite?*" — and David ſent meſſengers to tamper with, and draw her from her duty to her huſband — and he took her and lay with her — yea, as one ſin generally leads to another, a greater, when the effects of this unlawful amour were likely to become publick, and the wo-

man expoſed to a ſhameful death, her huſband, during the tranſaction, being in the army, David to ſcreen Bathſheba and himſelf, in the moſt premeditated and deliberate manner, firſt endeavoured to impoſe upon Uriah, that he might fancy the illicit offspring his own; but that ſcheme not ſucceeding to his wiſhes, he contrived Uriah's death, by ordering his ſituation in the ſiege of Rabbah, ſo as that he muſt be ſlain, and thus implicitly adding murder to his adultery. —— Let us oppoſe this part of David's conduct, to another period of his hiſtory. When he might have taken away the life of Saul, who was his enemy and aſleep in his power, he *ſtayed his ſervants, and ſuffered them not to riſe againſt Saul*; he only *cut off the ſkirt of his robe*, (as a proof that he might have killed him if ſo inclined) and for that little, *his heart ſmote him.*[y] But his faithful ſervant Uriah, he robbed of his honour and his life; nor does it appear that his heart once reproached him, with the injuſtice he had committed. He ſeems, rather, to have ſalved

[y] 1 Samuel xxiv. 4. 5.

ſalved over the baſe action, and hugged himſelf in the ſubtilty of his invention, that by getting rid of the huſband, he had both ſecured his reputation from diſgrace, and obtained quiet poſſeſſion of the object of his deſires.

But the thing diſpleaſed the Lord. —— If ſin be committed ever ſo privately, it is naked and open to the eyes of him, with whom we have to do. If the ſinner be ever ſo ſafe in his own opinion, though conſcience be aſleep, juſtice is awake, to rouſe the ſenſeleſs ſoul, and give it alarm from quarters leaſt apprehended. Offended by the crime of David, yet pitying his inſenſibility, the Lord ſent Nathan, a prophet much in the confidence of his prince, to rebuke him, and exhort him to repentance. —— But who dares reprove the great? Who has courage to call his ſovereign to account? The inſtances are very rare. Paul reaſoned before Felix, of *righteouſneſs, temperance, and judgment to come* — he reaſoned ſo cloſely, concerning his oppreſſive exactions, his adultery with Druſilla, and the awful retribution awaiting

him, that *Felix trembled.*[z] The freedom of the ancient prophets diſcovered them to ſpeak, as in the preſence of the King of kings, to look above the applauſe and delicacy of this world, not to court the countenance of the rich by winking at their vices, but, in the article of reproof, to ſet the prince and peaſant upon that level, on which the day of judgment will find them. — Yet the artful addreſs of the prophet Nathan is worthy of particular notice, and cannot be too deſervedly admired. Had he abruptly and precipitately charged David with his crime, he would probably, by inflaming the wrath of the king, have prevented the due effect of his cenſure. He took another method therefore of gaining the king's ear, and faſtening the conviction in his conſcience. Pretending that he came to plead the cauſe of a poor man, who was oppreſſed by his wealthy neighbour, "The rich "man, ſaid he, had exceeding many "flocks and herds. But the poor man "had nothing but one little ewe-lamb, "which he had bought and nouriſhed "up,

[z] Acts xxiv. 25.

" up; and it grew up with him and his
" children — it did eat of his own meat,
" and drink of his own cup — and his
" fondneſs for it increaſed to that degree,
" that it lay in his boſom, and was unto
" him as a daughter — it was his all —
" but he hoped that in time it would
" produce more, towards the ſupport of
" himſelf and his family. —— Neverthe-
" leſs, there came a traveller to the rich
" man's houſe, and in order that he might
" entertain his gueſt daintily, or without
" expence to himſelf, he went — not to
" his own well-fed flock, where he could
" have commanded the choiceſt of what
" was nice and delicate — but he for-
" cibly wreſted the poor man's lamb out
" of his boſom, and dreſſed it for the
" man that was come unto him." —— A
well-wrought ſtory! — The ſympathy of David's heart was awakened for the poor man; and unſuſpicious of any farther reach in the prophet, the dictates of natural juſtice immediately ſuggeſted, " As
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" becauſe he did this thing, and becauſe " he had no pity." —— *And Nathan ſaid unto David,* " *Thou art the man,* the very " man who haſt committed wickedneſs " equal to this, and far more atrocious. " — Thus ſaith the Lord God of Iſrael, " I took thee though a ſervant, and " anointed thee king over Iſrael — I de- " livered thee from the hand of Saul.— " I gave thee dominion, inſomuch that, " as far as was conſiſtent with juſtice and " equity, thou wert unreſtrained — the " faireſt of the flock might have been " thine. —— Why then didſt thou cruelly " ſnatch from Uriah the partner of his " life—and ſnatch from him that life " alſo, by the ſword of the children of " Ammon? Didſt thou flatter thyſelf, " that the murder was leſs enormous in " my ſight, becauſe, through thy deep- " laid machinations, he fell in the field " of battle? And didſt thou not recol- " lect, that if the thing was done ſe- " cretly, from the cognizance of the world, " I ſaw it, I marked it well, and would " ſurely judge thee for it?" —— Aſtoniſh- ment ſeized the unhappy monarch. Con-

demned

demned out of his own mouth, he ſaw it would be to no purpoſe to deny the fact; for he could not evade God's notice. He fell under the conviction, as a broken-hearted ſinner. Upon this occaſion he compoſed the *Fifty-firſt Pſalm*, wherein he confeſſes to the Lord, "*Againſt thee*, "*and thee only*, or chiefly, *have I ſinned*, "*and done this evil in thy ſight*; I con- "feſs it, *that thou mighteſt be juſtified*, "while thou arraigneſt me, *and clear*, "were thou to condemn me;" and wherein alſo he prays ſo importunately, "*De- "liver me from blood-guiltineſs, O God*, "*thou God of my ſalvation, and my tongue* "*ſhall ſing aloud of thy righteouſneſs*;" for though David was verbally aſſured by Nathan, that the Lord had put away his ſin, and he ſhould not die, a mere ſalvation from death, or the lake of fire and brimſtone, was not all he wiſhed for. He knew, in common with the reſt of God's people, that every place is hell, where God does not manifeſt his love to the ſoul. Were a prophet of the Lord, or an angel from heaven, to ſignify to an enlightened mind, that his ſins are

forgiven, unleſs the Spirit of the Lord inwardly perſuades him, he will not be at reſt, but inceſſantly cry as David did, *Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindneſs; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my tranſgreſſions. Hide thy face from my ſins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Caſt me not away from thy preſence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Reſtore unto me the joy of thy ſalvation, and uphold me,* with thy *free Spirit. Make me to hear joy and gladneſs,* that *the bones thou haſt broken may rejoice.* — But I have done.

I ſhall not purſue this narration any further, nor deſcribe the calamitous effects of Abſalom's rebellion, which the Lord permitted as a puniſhment on David, for the crime here referred to. My view is to make a more general application of the words of my text. The ſpeech of Nathan being ſo well calculated to work upon David's mind, and teach him the error of his late conduct, I would adopt it as a model for the preſent diſcourſe, and in like manner addreſs ſinners before me. —— And may I not with propriety aſſert,

aſſert, that there is a multitude of caſes, wherein they unſuſpectingly condemn other people, as David did the rich man in Nathan's parable, in which yet, if they bethought themſelves, they are more highly to blame, more fooliſh, more wicked. —— Shall I beg your attention, while I put a few of theſe caſes, and then ſubmit to your unprejudiced judgments for the truth of my aſſertion?

I. There is a character ſometimes found in the world, and juſtly deteſted — that of an unnatural ſon, who repays his affectionate parents injuriouſly, for all their love. —— Bad as the world is, I hope but few ſuch are to be met with; and yet the idea is not fictitious. The Apoſtle Paul, ſumming up the corruptions of the Gentile world, repreſents them as *diſobedient to parents*, and *without natural affection*.[a] — Let us attempt the deſcription for a moment. —— Can a woman forget her ſucking child, that ſhe ſhould not have compaſſion on the ſon of her womb? The tender mother feels for her offſpring — anxiouſly

[a] Rom. i. 30, 31.

anxiouſly watches over its infant years — is always attentive to its wants, and eaſily touched with its grievances — takes a part in every pain that affects the child, and is not happy but when it is at eaſe — is cloſely aſſiduous by day, and even loſes her reſt by night, on its account. — The affectionate father is concerned that his child be brought up properly — that he receive a ſuitable education — that he be trained to buſineſs — that he have wherewith to begin the world — and that he do well in it. —— What ought to be the return? Next to God, the higheſt and moſt dutiful reverence and reſpect — an attention to his employment, for the comfort of his parents, as well as his own intereſt — a ſolicitude to pleaſe his parents in all good things — a concern for their welfare — ſympathy with their infirmities and afflictions — in ſhort, that he ſhould be the ſtaff, the ſupport, and ornament, of their old age. —— Suppoſe the contrary — a ſon elated with pride and ſelf-conceit, unwilling to take the inſtructions of his father, and deſpiſing the advice of his mother — a ſon eagerly bent on

on gratifying his own inclinations, to the loading of the hearts of his parents with grief — a ſon deaf to the ſuggeſtions of filial affection, and hardened againſt the voice of his parents' diſtreſſes — a ſon who treats his parents with neglect or contempt, wilfully injures their fortune, deprives them of their ſubſiſtence, or does any act, tending to bring their gray hairs with ſorrow to the grave. You feel reſentment. — No wonder. — "Honour thy "father with thy whole heart, and for- "get not the ſorrows of thy mother, ſaid "the ſon of Sirach, for how canſt thou "recompence them the things they have "done for thee?" [b] Not to pay them due honour is baſe, degenerate, unworthy. Yet ſinner! *Thou art the man*, who acteſt thus criminally in an infinitely higher degree, than any earthly relation will admit of. — God called you into exiſtence — he has ſupported and defended you, by his almighty power — fed you with his liberal hand — and the proviſion his goodneſs ſet before you, his bleſſing made nouriſhment and ſtrength unto you. Look to

[b] Eccluſ. vii. 27.

to what part of your life you will, God has directed and comforted you. Your earthly parents were only the means he made uſe of, for your benefit. That good you derived ultimately from himſelf. He gave the affection, whereby they were inclined to conſult your intereſt. He furniſhed them with the ability to promote your welfare. And he has befriended you, when your father and mother were taken from you, or their power fell ſhort of your neceſſities. What have been your returns to him? — *Jeſhurun waxed fat and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered* with fatneſs: *then he forſook God* who *made him, and lightly eſteemed the rock of his ſalvation.* [c] — Suffer conſcience to ſpeak, and rehearſe your diſobedience to God, your creator and father. May he not juſtly reproach us, as he did his people Iſrael, *Hear O heavens, and give ear O earth, for the Lord hath ſpoken:* "*I have nouriſhed and brought up* "*children, and they have rebelled againſt* "*me.*" [d] Every ſin, as it contains in its boſom forgetfulneſs of God and undutifulneſs

[c] Deut. xxxii. 15. [d] Iſaiah i. 2.

fulneſs to him, is the baſe requital of a degenerate child to a fond and vigilant parent, aggravated by the thought of the dignity of that Being, whom we preſume to call by the appellation of *Father!* — What ſhall we ſay then of the numerous, the innumerable crimes, committed againſt him? Examples of a breach of the fifth commandment, ought to lead us to a reflection on our breach of the firſt. When we hear of refractory children, treating their parents contrary to that natural affection which ought to ſway them, or do ourſelves eſpecially undergo the mortification, while the mind is ſhocked at the barbarity of ſuch behaviour, let it turn in upon itſelf and aſk, "Is not my conſcience the repoſitory of behaviour more ſhameful? Have not I been more undutiful to God, my beſt parent?" A temper exactly ſimilar to what we may expect, as the reſult of a faithful reply to theſe queſtions, David diſcovered when driven from his capital, and his crown and life were endangered, by the unnatural ambition of a ſon, for whom he had ſhewn too partial a regard. So deep

was

was his humility, ſo pungent his ſorrow for his own fall, in the matter of Uriah, and ſo impreſſed was he with his own unworthineſs, to fill that throne he had ſcandalized, as juſt recited, that he reſigned himſelf to the righteous diſpoſal of God, to continue him king, reduce him to his original low ſtation, or deprive him of life. *Carry back the ark of God*, ſaid he to the prieſts, *If I ſhall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and ſhew me* both *it and his habitation. But if he thus ſay, I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I; let him do to me as ſeemeth good unto him.*[e] A true picture of the workings of repentance unto life, in that heart which poſſeſſes this evidence of its genuineneſs, *My ſin is ever before me!*[f]

II. How quickly touched are we, with ingratitude for favours received from us! —— To pity an individual — to relieve his indigence — to ſave him from poverty and ruin — to gratify him, not only in one or two, but many inſtances — to heap favour,

[e] 2 Sam. xv. 25, 26. [f] Pſalm li. 3.

favour, benevolence and good-will upon him — yet to find him inſenſible of all — and inſtead of teſtifying thankfulneſs and love, expreſſing ſymptoms of malice and enmity — doing evil to his benefactor — or ſecretly endeavouring to hurt or deſtroy, the hand employed in ſhewing him kindneſs. Nature riſes againſt the idea. "It was the worſt part of the character, "of the worſt man in the world, "He "who eat of my bread, hath lifted up "his heel againſt me.[g]" But more odious is ſin againſt God. Sinner! *Thou art the man*, who haſt thus ungratefully treated thy gracious benefactor. How many have God's thoughts of love been towards us! If we begin to reckon them, they are more than can be numbered. Every day has had its peculiar mercies renewed; and which of theſe days has not been a witneſs of our inſenſibility and unfruitfulneſs? What a profuſion of bleſſings is poured out! And which of theſe bleſſings have we acknowledged as became us, not to particularize thoſe abuſed to the purpoſes of

[g] Robinſon's Sermon on Decency in the Worſhip of God.

of iniquity? — How conſtantly and unremittingly, have the ſupplies of God's bounty followed us! And their very commonneſs has, through our corruptions, diminiſhed their value, and blinded our eyes to the diſcernment of God's hand in them. Does not the whole make up a dreadful charge, of ingratitude to the God of our lives, the giver of every good and perfect gift? Is there any thing of the ſort we have met with, that will bear any proportion to the ſad retaliation offered, for favours flowing from infinite love? Whenever, therefore, our angry paſſions are ſtirred up, by the reception of injury for obligation, and hatred for love, it will contribute greatly to the compoſure of our minds to recollect, that it is leſs marvellous men ſerve us ſo, ſince they repay God after the ſame manner. And we ſhall bear with calmneſs the indignities we feel, if we retain before our eyes a ſteadfaſt conviction of this fact, that whatever wrongs our falſe friends have done us, we have in a more flagitious manner done to God. — We are the men, we the women, the diſhonourers of our heavenly

heavenly benefactor. *All have ſinned, and come ſhort of the glory of God.* [h] — Again,

III. Treaſon againſt a juſt, a mild, and equal government, is always reckoned a crime of a capital nature. —— If government is a praiſe unto them who do well, and a terrour only to evil-doers, to conſpire againſt it, or meditate the deſtruction of a wiſe and righteous conſtitution, is an offence for which the traitor is univerſally hated — he lives deteſted, and dies almoſt unpitied. — Yet more heinous is the malignity of ſin. It may be ſafely affirmed, that the greateſt ſinner againſt God, diſtinguiſhes himſelf moſt as the enemy of his country. By diffuſing ſin, he foments war againſt heaven, and draws down wrath upon himſelf, and the land in which he lives. What then muſt ſin itſelf be? No earthly government is poſſeſſed of that rectitude, which is in the government of God; no laws are ſo pure, ſo reaſonable, or have ſuch a tendency to the good of the whole, and the happineſs of individuals. If treaſon againſt an

[h] Romans iii. 23.

an eſtabliſhment of human inſtitution is deemed atrocious, and pregnant with miſchief, who can compute the enormity of ſin, which if poſſible would overturn God's ſupreme authority over the univerſe? Every act of diſobedience is a denial of his right to command; *the carnal mind is enmity againſt God, for it is not ſubject to the law of God, neither indeed* while ſuch *can be.*[1] And ſinner! *Thou art the man,* who haſt committed this great wickedneſs. Lay your hand upon your heart; recount, if you are able, the catalogue of your iniquities: Every ſingle action was perpetrated in the preſence, and againſt the majeſty, of Almighty God. O! Say not that any ſin is ſmall or trifling. No doubt there are degrees of aggravation — circumſtances which may enhance the guilt of ſome, beyond that of others. But every wilful breach of the divine law, muſt riſe in heinouſneſs above an offence againſt an human government, as much as God the King of kings is ſuperiour, to the ſovereigns of this lower orb. And if the peace and regularity of ſociety eſtimates no

[1] Romans viii. 7.

no offence at too ſmall a rate, to exempt it from puniſhment, will not the Judge of all the earth inflict that wrath he has denounced, againſt the practices of iniquity? — Conſider what dire evils the commiſſion of only one ſin, by our firſt parents, was the cauſe of, the inlet to — conſider the miſeries which have overſpread the world, encreaſing as ſin made its unhappy progreſs — conſider that the hand of God is not unconcerned, in the various diſtreſſes we labour under — conſider the vengeance threatened to wicked men in the enſuing world; and let theſe proofs determine the queſtion, Is ſin ſmall — is it inconſiderable? —— This leads, therefore, to a

IV. Reflection, the words of my text naturally ſuggeſt. —— Obſerve a poor wretch bent on his own ruin — deaf to every warning given him — hardening his neck againſt reproof — uncontrolled by the admonitions of his friends, the reſtraints of his ſuperiours, or a concern for his own welfare — blindly following the impulſe of paſſion, and precipitating himſelf

himſelf into deſtruction. — You cannot view him unmoved. But alas! there are many, whoſe compaſſion would be excited by ſuch an object, who in a ſpiritual, and more awful ſenſe, are guilty of the ſame folly. Sinner! *Thou art the man.* —— How many the warnings we receive, that wickedneſs ſhall not paſs diſregarded! And how determined are the multitude upon it! How fearful the examples of its pernicious nature! And how greedily is it ſwallowed down, as if it were the chief good! God calls, and conſcience expoſtulates — miniſters in Chriſt's ſtead perſuade and beſeech — the Bible declares faithfully, that *the end of theſe things is death* [k] — the preaching of the word is with *great plainneſs of ſpeech.* [l] — But with what little effect! *Who hath believed our report?* [m] — Still ſinners ruſh obſtinately in their mad career; hazard their immortal ſouls, for the ſhort-lived indulgences of this tranſitory ſtate; and are enraged at the friendly hand, held out to ſtop them from plunging, into the abyſs of irremediable woe. — Who are reſolved on their own

[k] Rom. vi. 21. [l] 2 Cor. iii. 12. [m] Iſaiah liii. 1.

own deſtruction, who the murderers of themſelves if theſe men are not? — The fooliſh fly forfeits its life, by playing about the candle; the more infatuated ſinner makes ſtrong pretenſions to reaſon, and yet ſports with ſin, and fools away his precious ſoul.

The ſentiment in the text thus illuſtrated by a few examples, ſelected from many which experience affords, teaches us,

1. That true religion is a perſonal matter, and introduces the ſoul to ſelf-acquaintance. — *Know thyſelf* is a maxim cloſely inculcated by revelation, and a maxim written upon the heart of every godly man. *Thou that teacheſt another*, ſaid the Apoſtle to the Jews, *teacheſt thou alſo thyſelf? Thou that preacheſt a man ſhould not ſteal*, by over-reaching thy neighbour, or in ſome other deceitful form, *doſt thou ſteal? Thou that ſayeſt a man ſhould not commit adultery, doſt thou*, in heart or practice, *commit adultery? Thou that*, by thy profeſſion, *abhorreſt idols, doſt thou*, after a different manner, *commit ſacrilege? Thou that makeſt thy boaſt of the law, by break-*

ing the law diſhonoureſt thou God?[n] "If "thou doſt not ſin in one form, doſt thou "in another, equally heinous and injurious "to the Lord?" —— Theſe queſtions may be put into a chriſtian dreſs: You, upon the one hand, who talk of others as denying the doctrines of God's grace, whilſt you profeſs to believe them, do you alſo love them, and experience their transforming influence? You who reflect bitterly on others, as diſhonouring Chriſt and denying his Deity, Are you in your hearts abaſed before him? Do you honour and worſhip him as God? You that ſpeak of certain denominations, as entertaining principles derogatory to good works, Do you practice, are you zealous of good works? You who ſo unweariedly declaim, about the imperfection of the charity of chriſtians in our day, Are you charitable yourſelf; or a melancholy example of the like charge you prefer againſt your brethren? In a word, you who with ſo much facility ſpy out, and diligently ſpread abroad the faults of people around you, readily diſcerning wherein they act unbe-

[n] Rom. ii. 21, 22, 23.

unbecoming the goſpel, aſk yourſelves, Do you in no reſpect alſo contradict the goſpel? Our principal attention ought to be at home. There we are more immediately concerned. Even the miſbehaviour of others ſhould caution us, to keep our hearts with more diligence. —— Such is the pride of the heart, ſuch the ſelf-flattery of the mind, ſuch our proneneſs to forget our own faults, and loſe ſight of our own blemiſhes, that the man who is moſt attentive to the workings of his mind, and deals moſt faithfully with his heart, ſees abundant reaſon to cry to God, *Who can underſtand* his *errors? Cleanſe thou me from ſecret* faults. [o] How great and numerous the errors of that man then, who does not catechize his own heart at all! — Inattention to this duty is the reaſon, many are ſo quick-ſighted to *the mote that is in their brother's eye*, at the time that they are ignorant, of *the beam which is in their own eye*, [p] condemn ſmall faults in their neighbours, and overlook greater in themſelves; as the Jews blamed their fore-fathers for killing the prophets, [q]

[o] Pſalm xix. 12. [p] Mat. vii. 3. [q] Mat. xxiii. 30.

whilſt they with wicked hands crucified the Son of God. " When the queſtion " is about a man's own ſin, his heart " finds a thouſand artifices to excuſe or " extenuate it; but when a man is under " the influence of paſſion againſt the ſins " of others, it quite alters the caſe; he " finds no end in exaggerating the guilt " of an injury or affront, and his paſſion " will find means, to make pretended ex- " cuſes appear heavy aggravations." —— On the contrary, the uſes of directing our attention within, and dealing ſtrictly with ourſelves, are very important, and inſeparably connected with the exerciſe of religion. It will make us more tender of the faults we perceive, leſs liable to report them, and leſs ſuſceptible of affront from them. " The vehemence of our paſ- " ſions againſt ſin, would do very little " prejudice to charity, if theſe paſſions " were as equal and impartial, when " directed homewards, as they are vehe- " ment againſt others. If men could " hate themſelves as they do their neigh- " bours, it would be a good help, to- " wards their loving their neighbours as " them-

" themſelves." [r] —— This ſelf-examination would alſo humble us before the Lord; which, though it might give us pain to be ſo often reminded of our defects, yet would do us abundant good, by correcting that ſpirit of pride, which lurks deeply within us, and lays our ſouls open to ſo much miſchief. —— *If* again, *we would judge ourſelves, we ſhould not be judged.* [s] This ſelf-application, as it diſcovered our ſins, would teach us the uſe and value of the righteouſneſs of Chriſt, *even the righteouſneſs of God*, which is *by faith of Jeſus Chriſt, unto all and upon all them that believe.* [t] It would, further, make us modeſt, and teachable, deſirous of inſtruction, and joyful in receiving it; watchful againſt ſin, with the temptations thereunto; earneſt in our petitions for *the waſhing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghoſt* [u] — in a word, it would prevent the often fatal conſequences of ſelf ignorance, from whence multitudes ſay, *Peace, peace, when there is no peace,* [w] by which multi-

[r] Maclaurin's Sermons and Eſſays, p. 134.

[s] 1 Cor. xi. 31. [t] Rom. iii. 22.

[u] Tit. iii. 5. [w] Jer. viii. 11

tudes loſe ground before they are aware, and unthinkingly hurry on from ſin to ſin, *as a bird haſteth to the ſnare, and knoweth not that it* is *for his life*;[x] it would lead the mind into an acquaintance with Chriſt, communion with God, a growing conformity to the divine image, and a meetneſs for the viſion and enjoyments of heaven. Happy temper! Is it not worth ſeeking? Do we not learn hence,

2. The manner of the operations of God's grace, in an heart poſſeſſed of real religion? —— Let a ſermon be pointed and ſtriking — let it aim at particular vices — and a miniſter be faithful while meek, in diſcountenancing wickedneſs, tis not uncommon for delinquents amongſt the hearers (from a conſciouſneſs of their own guilt, and yet a ſpirit of pride reſiſting conviction) to exclaim, wrathfully enough, "He means *me*." "He aimed all his "diſcourſe at *me*." Perhaps the miniſter did not know, that ſuch a man was in the congregation; or ſay he did, an ambaſſador of Chriſt Jeſus, who ſpeaks in the name of his Lord, muſt not ſmoothly omit

[x] Prov. vii. 23.

omit a remonſtrance againſt a particular ſin, becauſe a wicked perſon preſent may think it directed to him. Indeed, the very intention of giving the rebuke is, that it may ſtick faſt in the minds of thoſe whom it ſuits. If it has this effect, and produces repentance and reformation, it will no longer fit the parties; but while conſcience bears its teſtimony, however reluctant or angry, to the indulgence of the ſin, it bears an equal teſtimony to the propriety of the challenge for it. And when God, by his effectual grace, awakens the ſoul of a ſinner deeply and ſeriouſly, this is the way in which he works. In converſion he opens the ſinner's eyes, to a ſight of his own ſinfulneſs of heart and life — *tells him all that ever he did*[y] — ſays to him, "*Thou art the man*, who "haſt thus and thus offended me, and "injured thy own ſoul" — teaches him to conſider all the Bible ſpeaks, as pointed diſtinctly to him. The ſtrict ſignification of the word rendered in the New-Teſtament *repentance*, is *ſerious conſideration, a laying to heart*, and *pondering over in the*

[y] John iv. 29.

mind [z] what God ſpeaks. This, we have ſeen, is the only method of profiting thereby. He who ſlights it neglects true wiſdom. He who comes not to the light, leſt his deeds be reproved, muſt of neceſſity walk in darkneſs. There is no poſſible cure for him, until he be induced to make this ſelf-application. He will ſtill perſiſt, in hardening his heart againſt God's reproofs and threatenings. —— However I muſt obſerve,

3. That there is a moment drawing on, when theſe declarations will have their full effect to terrify, if not convert the ſinner. Awful as it is to be arraigned at the bar of conſcience, how affecting the ſtate, when the cold ſweat of death bedews the cheek, when diſſolution is at hand, the proſpect of eternity in view, and withal, a guilty mind accuſes, "*Thou art the man*, who "haſt waſted thy time, neglected thy ad- "vantages, ſquandered away thy talents, "and undone thy ſoul!" And let me add ſomething more ſolemn. Is the awakened voice of conſcience in this world loud and piercing? What will it be in that day,

[z] μέλλοια.

day, when Chriſt proclaims the ſummons to judgment — aſſembles the whole world before him — brings to light the works of darkneſs, and hidden things of diſhoneſty — and when the ſinners, unable to deny a ſingle article of their indictment, retreat back with horrour — and ſink into endleſs perdition! —— O! As you fear this dreadful reckoning, ſeek to be prepared — prepared to meet Jeſus there, as your friend and your God. — Regard convictions as the meſſages of the Moſt High — cheriſh them, and pray that they may be effectual to your converſion and ſalvation — that your ſins being forgiven, and your ſouls ſanctified, you may be found of God at laſt in peace, without ſpot and blameleſs. Amen!

DISCOURSE XVII.

The character of Abijah, the ſon of Jeroboam.

1 KINGS xiv. 13.

—— *Becauſe in him there is found* ſome *good thing, toward the Lord God of Iſrael, in the houſe of Jeroboam.*

TO adjuſt the proper ſtandard, whereby we may aſcertain with preciſion, the reality of our poſſeſſion of true religion, has given riſe to ſo many ſpeculations, and employed ſo many pens, that (whatever ſucceſs they have had, or however divided their opinions ſtill prove it to be a queſtion of no ſmall conſequence, to the comfort of God's people, and to diſtinguiſh between them and thoſe, who think they are ſomething while they are nothing.

To

To inveſtigate the ſubject with accuracy, we muſt for the preſent, take our eyes off thoſe different degrees of advancement in the divine life, chriſtians may through grace attain unto, and confine ourſelves to thoſe criteria, or marks, which are common to them all, which may ſuit chriſtians of lower as well as higher abilities, of ſmaller as well as larger experience. — Theſe being found, it will be natural to conclude, that, coming from the one unchangeable Being, finding all men in the ſame unhappy circumſtances, having the ſame view, and conducting finally to the ſame enjoyments, they have been one and the ſame in all ages and diſpenſations, and are that bond of union, which has comprehended the whole church of believers, under the fainter light of the Old-Teſtament, and the clearer adminiſtration of the New. — My text bids fair for containing, ſuch a conciſe and ſimple explication of vital godlineſs, as ſome *good thing in* a man, *toward the Lord God of Iſrael.* — It was the character given of a very young perſon, a *child* as he is called, a mere youth, Abijah ſon of Je-

roboam, the firſt king of thoſe ten tribes, which revolted from Rehoboam the ſon of Solomon, and were denominated Iſrael, in diſtinction from the two tribes and a half, which remained with the poſterity of David. — For the ſins, and particularly the idolatries, of Solomon in the latter part of his life, God (who in the ſecond commandment forbidding idolatry, aſſures us he is *a jealous God, viſiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth* generation [a]) rent the greateſt part of the kingdom from his ſon, who unwiſely approved of his father's conformity to the heathen, and his illiberal exactions, and, by the prophet Ahijah, appointed Jeroboam governor. [b] It was then a reaſonable expectation, that Jeroboam, thus remarkably favoured, ſhould be very obedient, eſpecially as God made him an expreſs promiſe, "*And it ſhall be, if thou wilt* "*hearken unto all that I command thee,* "*and wilt walk in my ways, and do* that "which is *right in my ſight, to keep my* "*ſtatutes and my commandments, as David* "*my*

[a] Exodus xx. 5. [b] 1 Kings xi. 4, 5. 12. 31.

"*my ſervant did; that I will be with*
"*thee, and build thee a ſure houſe, as I*
"*built for David, and will give Iſrael unto*
"*thee.*"[c] — But this Jeroboam refuſed. — Not truſting to the promiſe of the Almighty, he conſulted the carnal reaſonings of his own heart; and worldly policy ſuggeſted, that if all Iſrael went up to Jeruſalem, as uſual, to keep the paſſover and to ſacrifice, they would be inveigled back under the dominion of Rehoboam, and he ſhould loſe the throne of Iſrael. Therefore he did that which was evil in the ſight of the Lord; he ſet up *two calves*, as the ſcripture contemptuouſly ſtiles them. Theſe are conjectured, by ingenious writers, not to have been idols, or falſe gods, profeſſedly in oppoſition to the God of heaven, but rather ſome imitation of the ark, the cherubims, and mercy-ſeat at Jeruſalem, with a view to perſuade Jeroboam's followers, that the ſame God being worſhipped, and the form of worſhip the ſame, it made no difference, whether God was worſhipped at Jeruſalem or elſewhere. Accordingly he ſet up one in the

[c] 1 Kings xi. 38.

the tribe of Dan, that the people at one extremity of the nation might prefer that ſituation, to the fatigue of travelling to the temple of Solomon; the other in Bethel, not far diſtant from Jeruſalem, the inducement to which was perhaps, that Bethel ſignified *the houſe of God*, and was regarded with veneration, as the ſpot where the Lord firſt met with their father Jacob. Moreover he caſt the tribe of Levi out of the prieſthood, he proceeded to appoint prieſts without any diſtinction of tribes or perſons, and inſtituted a feaſt widely different from what the Lord had commanded, even *in the month which he had deviſed of his own heart*; ſo that to Dan and Bethel all Iſrael went to worſhip, Bethel became properly Bethaven, *an houſe of wickedneſs*,[d] and a dreadful ſtigma is faſtened upon Jeroboam, that *he drove Iſrael from following the Lord, and made them ſin a great ſin.*[e] It teaches us, that God highly diſapproves of the very leaſt alteration, in his worſhip and ordinances. If we wiſh to know his inſtituted worſhip, let us go to the law and to

[d] Hoſea x. 5. [e] 2 Kings xvii. 21.

to the teſtimony; his word lies open, wherein he has *made it plain* and eaſy, *that he may run that readeth it.*[f] But if we neglect the Bible, and mix the inventions of men with the worſhip of God, we ſhall tranſgreſs as Jeroboam did, and by ſmall deviations pave the way for greater, as the ſucceſſors of Jeroboam (Ahab and others) brought more aggravated abominations amongſt Iſrael, and as the chriſtian church, ſpeedily after the Apoſtolic age, adopted thoſe unſcriptural innovations, which by degrees encreaſed to that enormous maſs of impiety, the church of Rome.[g] —— But we proceed ——

Jeroboam having thus departed from God, the Lord did not immediately give him up, but ſent a prophet to rebuke him in the name of the Moſt High, and warn him of his danger. — The prophet courageouſly approached, when the king and people were aſſembled before the altar at Bethel[h] — he rebuked the king publickly,

[f] Habakkuk ii. 2.

[g] Jennings's Jewiſh Antiquities, Vol. II. p. 26.

[h] 1 Kings xiii.

lickly, for treating divine ordinances with the irreverent freedom he had done — he propheſied of Joſiah, who afterwards polluted this altar — and, in token of the truth of his prophecy, commanded the altar to rend itſelf, and the altar was obedient. — But if men *will not hear Moſes and the prophets, neither will they be perſuaded, if one roſe from the dead*;[i] all the effect this meſſage had upon Jereboam was to enrage him, ſo that he ſtretched forth his hand, and commanded the prophet to be ſeized. This command, indeed, was prevented by another rebuke. The arm ſtretched out, to lay hold on the man of God, was forthwith palſied, that Jeroboam could not pull it in again to him. Yet did not this ſtroke convert the hardened prince. He felt the malady, and beſought the prophet's prayers. Upon the interceſſion of the latter, the uſe of the arm was reſtored. Yet he held faſt his falſe worſhip, returned not unto the Lord, but actually conſecrated himſelf a prieſt, that his perſon might be held more ſacred. For theſe acts of iniquity, therefore, God deter-

[i] Luke xvi. 31.

determined to cut off the houſe of Jeroboam. But there was one in the family, for whom he had a particular regard, not to raiſe him to the throne of Iſrael, but advance him to an heavenly throne. Young Abijah was capable of underſtanding truth from falſehood, and giving evidence of his love to religion. Diſdaining the ſplendour of the court, he dared to appear for the Lord God of Iſrael. Pious people, no doubt, formed the greateſt hopes of this young prince, that ſhould he ever wear the crown, the times would be reformed — but God thought fit to diſappoint them. —— Such was even the affection of Jeroboam for his ſon, that when he was ſick, he ſent to enquire of the prophet Ahijah concerning his recovery. Yea, that the enquiry might be the cloſer, and the anſwer more faithfully reported, he ſent his own queen on this errand. Not willing, however, that ſhe ſhould be known, as the wife of a perſon ſo obnoxious to the prophet, as his conſcience repreſented him to be, he ordered her to go diſguiſed as an ordinary woman, and the better to ingratiate herſelf with the man

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of God, and obtain a favourable anſwer, to take a preſent in her hand. But how vain the thought of being hid from God! Was the Lord, like the conceived notions of the heathen deities, to be impoſed on, to be bribed, or flattered into the conceſſion wiſhed for by Jeroboam? Ahijah was blind through age, but the Lord revealed to him the intended viſit. Before the wife of Jeroboam arrived, therefore, he had his anſwer ready. And (in like manner as all God's miniſters are forbid to diſſemble, or ſpeak peace to the wicked) ere ſhe could deliver her meſſage and the conciliating preſent, ſhe was accoſted in words very doleful, "*Come in* "*thou wife of Jeroboam: Why feigneſt thou* "*thyſelf to be another? For I* am *ſent to* "*thee with heavy* tidings." "*Go,*" *tell Jeroboam,* "*Thus ſaith the Lord God of* "*Iſrael, foraſmuch as I exalted thee from* "*among the people, and made thee prince* "*over Iſrael. And yet thou haſt not been* "*as my ſervant David, who kept my com-* "*mandments; but haſt done evil above all* "*that were before thee; and made thee other* "*gods and molten images, to provoke me*

"*to*

" *to anger*; *therefore behold, I will bring*
" *evil upon the houſe of Jeroboam. Him*
" *that dieth of Jeroboam in the city ſhall*
" *the dogs eat*; *and him that dieth in the*
" *field ſhall the fowls of the air eat. Ariſe*
" *thou, therefore, get thee to thine own*
" *houſe*; and when thy *feet enter into the*
" *city the child ſhall die.* And *all Iſrael*
" *ſhall mourn for him, and bury him: for*
" *he only of Jeroboam ſhall come to the*
" *grave, becauſe in him* (adds our text)
" *there is found* ſome *good thing, toward*
" *the Lord God of Iſrael, in the houſe of*
" *Jeroboam.*" —— Struck dumb with the diſcovery of her quality, and with this ſhocking intelligence, the princeſs left the prophet, and the moment her feet touched the threſhold of her palace, part of the prediction was fulfilled, in the death of Abijah. The remainder alſo in due time was verified; for though Jeroboam died a natural death, Nadab his ſucceſſor was ſlain by the conſpiracy of Baaſha, who likewiſe ſlew all the family, that *he left not to Jeroboam any that breathed, until he had deſtroyed him, according unto the ſaying of the Lord, which he ſpake by his ſervant Ahijah*

Ahijah the Shilonite.[k] I return however to the character of Abijah, as laid down in our text, —— Two particulars the words afford for our conſideration:

I. A deſcription of true religion, as ſome *good thing in a man, toward the Lord God of Iſrael*; and,

II. The duty and privilege of thoſe who poſſeſs it, expreſſed by the aſſurance, that *there was found* in Abijah that good thing.

I. It is with propriety that religion is defined to be, ſome *good thing in* a man, *toward the Lord God of Iſrael.* —— This definition divides itſelf into three branches. Religion is ſomething *towards the Lord God of Iſrael* — ſomething *good* — ſomething *in* him who partakes of it.

1. When it is called ſome *thing*, commentators agree in the principal idea, that by it is intended ſomething real, ſolid, and ſubſtantial, not a mere name, a trifle, a ſhadow, a work of the fancy, a waking dream, but a true principle, a work which may

[k] 1 Kings xv. 29.

may be depended on. And when it is added, *towards the Lord God of Iſrael*, it teaches us, that religion has the great God for its object, and conſiſts chiefly in ſolemn tranſactions between God and the ſoul. Let the godly man have lived under the Old or New-Teſtament, in ancient or modern times, let him live in a court or a cottage, let him have more or fewer advantages, methinks this part of the character cannot fail of ſuiting him. Therefore, though the Lord may be ſtiled here *the Lord God of Iſrael*, to denote that he diſtinguiſhed himſelf, in the courſe of his Providence, as the patron, the king, and protector of the ſeed of Abraham, after the fleſh, it is more eſpecially applicable to him, as the God of his ſpiritual Iſrael, *the* true *circumciſion, who worſhip God in the ſpirit, and rejoice in Chriſt Jeſus, and have no confidence in the fleſh.*[1] — No doubt, even they who belong to God, and are indulged with the experience of his grace, find reaſon to lament their imperfections, the languor of their deſires, the ſhortcomings of their lives; and (an addition as

[1] Phil. iii. 3.

as the word is to our tranſlation) how juſtly they are ſaid, to have only *ſome* of this work. Though the ſeeds of all the graces are ſown, there are many things wanting to bring them forward, to that life, ſtrength and vigour, we wiſh, we hope for, we expect. The greateſt chriſtian eſteems himſelf leſs than the leaſt of all ſaints, becauſe he ſees moſt of what he ought to be, and how much he falls ſhort thereof. Nevertheleſs, thank God, if there is but ſome thing, there is that ſomething. All God's people have more or leſs of ſpiritual life, and a diſcernment of God, as an holy and juſt Being, a God who knows the thoughts, who hates ſin, and will puniſh the ſinner. — All God's people have ſome humility before the Lord for their offences, ſome faith in the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and dependence on him for ſalvation and eternal life, ſome proper truſt in him, and well grounded hope in his mercy. — All God's people have a degree of love and union of heart to God, whereby they dwell in him, and are one ſpirit with him. — All God's people, according to their meaſure of grace,

grace, have received a prevalent love to holineſs, for the ſake of its likeneſs to God, and becauſe it is well-pleaſing in his ſight, as well as that it is the only way, in which they can be partakers of the celeſtial felicity. — All God's people do bring forth fruit, and give evidence of their acquaintance with the vital truths of the goſpel, by ſtriving to live conſiſtently therewith, not in the view of being ſeen of men, but as before the Lord. There may be chriſtians of various growth, in the family of Chriſt, babes, young men and old men; the babes may be but weak in the faith, and at times beclouded and uncomfortable in their walk; the young men ſtrong in the Lord, vigorous in reſiſting the evil one, and zealous in promoting the cauſe of their Redeemer; the old men, after long experience, may be leſs hot and more ſteady, not leſs earneſt or chearful, but more fixed, ſettled, and uniform; but they all agree in the leading conſideration, in having ſome *thing toward the Lord God of Iſrael*; and he who has none of this regard is a wicked man,

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in the gall of bitterneſs and bond of iniquity.[m] —— Farther,

II. This principle is called a *good* thing. —— Our bleſſed Lord, therefore, ſtiles it *that good part*,[n] and the Apoſtle Paul *a good work*.[o] — The qualities which go to make a ſubſtantial *good*, are beauty — uſefulneſs — and durableneſs; all which are, in the ſtricteſt ſenſe, true of religion.

1. It is beautiful. — Chriſt puts glory upon his ſervants. As God is glorious in holineſs, ſo are his people, in the proportion that they reſemble him. Hence we read of *the beauty of holineſs*,[p] and that the *king's daughter*, the church of God, *is all glorious*.[q] — If it looks well, in a perſon who has been guilty of a fault, to acknowledge his error, how becoming in a ſinner to confeſs his ſins to God! If it is pleaſing, to behold reconciliation take place of contention, how much more agreeable, to ſee the enemies of the croſs of Chriſt, made willing to take up that croſs, and *follow the Lamb whitherſoever he goeth!*[r] How beautiful, when the haughty are

[m] Acts viii. 23. [n] Luke x. 42. [o] Phil. i. 6.
[p] Pſalm cx. 3. [q] Pſalm xlv. 13. [r] Rev. xiv. 4.

are changed to meekneſs — the boiſterous to calmneſs — the fretful to patience — the quarrelſome, to quarrel with none ſo much as themſelves — the idle, the thief, the drunkard, the ſwearer, to diligence, honeſty, ſobriety, temperance, and reverence for God moſt High! How beautiful, when the members of the church of Chriſt are united in heart, to their great Head and to one another, bearing with one another's infirmities, ſympathizing with one another's grievances, *forgiving one another, even as God, for Chriſt's ſake, hath forgiven*[s] them all, building up themſelves and one another, ſtriving together for the faith of the goſpel. *Behold, how good and how pleaſant for brethren to dwell together in unity!*[t] — Religion is that ornamental dreſs, which outſhines all the elegance of the earth; and *they that are wiſe*, alſo, *ſhall ſhine* above, *as the brightneſs of the firmament.*[u] Which leads me to obſerve

2. That religion is alſo uſeful. — That which is pretty but not profitable, we commonly regard as a bauble, a ſplendid

 trifle,

[s] Eph. iv. 32. [t] Pſalm cxxxiii. 1. [u] Dan. xii. 3.

trifle, a toy, of no value except to look at. The chief ingredient in true beauty is its proportion, its proper arrangement, ſo as to contribute to comfort and convenience. And herein, alſo, religion diſcovers its worth. We cannot, indeed, be profitable to the Almighty; yet, as the works of creation prove God's Being and perfections, ſo does religion declare his glory, and ſhew forth his handy-work, *for we are his workmanſhip, created in Chriſt Jeſus unto good works.*[w] — Moreover, not only is the very preſence of God's people a bleſſing where they dwell, but grace is the moſt powerful incentive to uſefulneſs in our ſtations. Contractedneſs of ſpirit, commonly called ſelfiſhneſs, is ſelf-love carried to a ſinful exceſs, ſelf-love frozen hard as the nether mill-ſtone. Religion, on the other hand, enlarges the mind, and moves it to live not to itſelf alone. God is love, and true piety has love interwoven with its nature, exciting to do good to friends and enemies, to ſeek not our own things excluſively, but every man another's welfare, not merely to

[w] Eph. ii. 10.

to wiſh, but promote his comfort and happineſs; to extend our compaſſion to the bodies, and more particularly the ſouls of men; to ſtudy how we may be moſt ſerviceable in our families, in the church, in the world, and while we believe in God, to be careful to maintain good works, becauſe theſe things are good and profitable unto men. —— Yet more intimately is religion a bleſſing, to the ſoul by grace endowed with it, by reſcuing it from the dominion of corruption — by reconciling it to God — by inſpiring it with faith, with hope, and joy divine — by guiding it through the world, and exalting it above ſin, and the dark atmoſphere of this ſinful ſtate, to the reſt and brightneſs of paradiſe. I appeal to you, from this ſmall ſpecimen, whether the utility of religion is not apparent? Come, *taſte and ſee* for yourſelves, then, *that the Lord is good, and* how *bleſſed is the man who truſteth in him*;* the remainder is more than eye hath ſeen, or ear heard, or heart conceived of. —— It will farther recom-

* Pſalm xxxiv. 8.

mend this good thing to your regard, to be informed alſo,

3. That it is a durable good. —— Not like the beautiful and even uſeful, of terreſtrial objects, which grow worſe for the wear, and periſh with the uſing; but the more grace is exerciſed, the brighter, the more beautiful it appears, the ſtronger, the more vigorous it flouriſhes. — The promiſe of unchanging love is, alſo, that it ſhall never forſake him who poſſeſſes it. So that there is ground for *being confident of this very thing, that he who has begun, will perform it unto the day of Jeſus Chriſt*; [y] and we may reſt our humble expectation, that it ſhall become more confirmed and eſtabliſhed, under the guardianſhip and culture of God's Spirit; it ſhall encreaſe to the perfection of heaven, and laſt to eternity. Therefore it is ſtiled *life*, and *everlaſting life*, [z] *an exceeding, and eternal weight of glory*, [a] *a crown of glory which fadeth not away*. [b] — Sum up the whole — examine the caſe thoroughly — compare (if a compariſon may be drawn between)

[y] Phil. i. 6. [z] Rom. vi. 22.
[a] 2 Cor. iv. 17. [b] 1 Pet. v. 4.

between) the moſt precious and permanent earthly goods, and this of a ſpiritual nature; What is the concluſion? *The world paſſeth away, and the luſt thereof, but he who doeth the will of God abideth for ever.*[c] —— Still it remains to be decided, Wherein conſiſts the real experience of this good thing? I add, therefore,

III. Another property of true religion, mentioned in our text; it was ſeated *in* Abijah; a deſcription of it as an inward work, to diſtinguiſh it from all fictitious claims whatſoever. — Not only is there one ſpecies of irreligion, which conſiſts in direct defiance to the revealed will of God, but many ſorts diſguiſed under falſe pretenſions, difficult to be known, deceiving the ſoul, and therefore to be guarded and prayed againſt. — The eſſential power of godlineſs is much more than the decency of outward form, than the ſtrictneſs, regularity, and even ſeeming ſerioufneſs of demeanour, though it will certainly produce theſe exemplary

[c] 1 John ii. 17.

manners. — 'Tis abundantly deeper than the beſt of notions, which may catch the underſtanding, inform the judgment, fill the mouth with declamation (commonly in this caſe cenſorious enough) and yet cover a ſoul eſtranged from God. — 'Tis more ſolemn, than any mere agitation of the paſſions and affections. There may be a kind of conviction, fear and horrour, the ebullitions of the ſpirit of bondage alarmed by the terrours of the Lord, which are not indeed to be thrown away as of no value, but attended to, as motives to ſeek that we may be born again; yet conſidered alone, are to be ſeparated from the life of religion, and, where truſted in, have frequently evaporated, and left the ſinner dead in treſpaſſes and ſins. Often have people been ſeized, too, with fancied comforts and joys (to ſay nothing of thoſe raptures, that give reaſon to ſuſpect their emptineſs by their noiſe and flightineſs) they have heard the word with gladneſs, and, like Herod, done many things commanded, yet had no root in them, and endured but for a while; the wind of temptation

paſſed

paſſed over them and they were gone, and the profeſſion which once knew them, knows them no longer. — True godlineſs is the *hidden man of the heart.*[d] Tis at the heart, and in ſecret before God, that the ſoul is effectually humbled; *Chriſt dwells in* his people's *hearts by faith*;[e] *the love of God is ſhed abroad in their hearts, by the Holy Ghoſt given unto them*;[f] they are *renewed in the ſpirit of their mind*,[g] and *Chriſt is formed in them the hope of glory*;[h] from the deep rooted experience and ſavour of religion within, they bud, bloſſom, and bring forth the fruits of righteouſneſs, and the *leaf* of their profeſſion continues green and *unwithered*;[i] for it muſt be obſerved, that wherever the work is genuine, it will prove its exiſtence by nothing more, than a conſtant jealouſy over the heart, and the fear of God implanted there, as under grace a preſervative againſt temptation, and a ſpur to the ſoul, to lay aſide every weight and the ſin which ſo eaſily beſets it, and to run with patience the race ſet before it. The enquiry of in-

[d] 1 Pet. iii. 4. [e] Eph. iii. 17. [f] Rom. v. 5.
[g] Eph. iv. 23. [h] Col. i. 27. [i] Pſalm i. 3.

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[g] Eph. iv. 23. [h] Col. i. 27. [i] Pſalm i. 3.

finite neceſſity, therefore, is this: "What "are we at heart?" As a man is diſtinguiſhed from a brute, by his being endued with ſomething more than inſtinct and carnal appetites, namely, reaſon, the candle of the Lord, ſo a godly man is diſtinguiſhed from the mere man of reaſon, by having the throne of God's grace ſet up in his heart, in oppoſition to the reign of Satan and corruption. —— And ſhall I now proceed,

II. To point out the duty and privilege of the ſaints, as ſet forth in our text? —— That good thing which Abijah partook of was *found* in him; inſtructing us,

1. That religion is not intended to lie dormant in the heart, or hidden, as a light under a buſhel; but that duty enjoins good people, to let it be known they are for God. Therefore ſome render the text, *A good word toward the Lord God of Iſrael.* —Convinced of his father's ſin, Abijah bore a teſtimony, that the true worſhip was not in Dan and Bethel, but Jeruſalem; was not in Jeroboam's calves, but in God's own ordinances. Melancholy as it

it was, that in a court ſo ſplendid and populous, there was found only this one, whoſe heart was right with God, it was at the ſame time wonderful, that ſo corrupt a court could produce one, though a youth, to ſpeak for him. Is not he a pattern for the youth, in our day, to copy after? And does not the piety and zeal of this ſtripling, amidſt all his diſcouragements, ſhame the coldneſs and indifference of many modern, and older profeſſors? Think of your duty, Chriſtians! The times are bad enough: Do let it be found, that there is ſome good in you, to counterbalance their evil, and that while the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord is lifting up a ſtandard againſt him. Appear for his cauſe, who loved you, and gave himſelf for you. While the multitude is ſo heartily engaged in the hard ſervice of ſin, be you the more fervent in ſerving the Lord. Be prudent, yet faithful to the precious ſouls around you. And ſet the uprightneſs, the conſcientiouſneſs, the holineſs, the regularity of your profeſſion and walk, be a living teſtimony for God, that you are not aſhamed of

the goſpel of Chriſt. Better to be ridiculed as ſingular, than countenanced as wicked. — If you even receive injury, rather ſubmit to it, and pray for them that deſpitefully uſe you, than let your good be evil ſpoken of, by too tenaciouſly maintaining your own right, at leaſt in caſes doubtful, and not eſſential to your ſubſiſtence. So David ſpeaks, in his own perſon and that of Chriſt, *Then reſtored I that which I took not away.*[k] Thus we ſhall ſhine as lights in the world, and by manifeſtation of the truth, commend ourſelves to every man's conſcience in the ſight of God. —— And

2. It is the exhilarating privilege of ſuch, that the Lord will find them out. —By which ought not to be underſtood, that he is at any loſs concerning them: *The Lord knoweth them that are his.*[l] Whatever good they have is of his Spirit's implantation. He found them among the loſt, he ſealed them for his own, and cannot miſtake their perſons if ſurrounded by a crowd of the ungodly. The meaning is, that he takes notice of, and will parti-

[k] Pſalm lxix. 3. [l] 2 Tim. ii. 19.

particularly diſtinguiſh them. *Them that honour me*, ſaith He, *I will honour.*[m] He did not overlook Lot in the midſt of Sodom, or young Abijah in the houſe of Jeroboam. What a glorious atteſtation had the latter from the God of Abraham, to the reality of that faith, whereby he became one of the ſpiritual ſeed of Abraham! Will it not be our mercy, whilſt the whole world lieth in wickedneſs, to have the witneſs of God's Spirit with our ſpirits, that we are the children of God? — Should the world reproach us as they did our Redeemer, the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous; it will be our glory to be deſpiſed in ſuch a cauſe, to ſuffer in ſuch company, for when Jeſus is glorified, we ſhall be glorified together with him. — God ſaw the ſtorm of wrath approaching the houſe of Jeroboam, and removed Abijah out of its reach. 'Tis a diſmal token to nations and kingdoms, but a high mark of diſtinction to the people of God, if when deſolating judgments impend, he takes them away from the evil to come — hides their bodies

[m] 1 Samuel ii. 30.

in the grave, and their ſouls in heaven. Or ſhould they, for wiſe reaſons, be appointed to weather the ſtorm, and the frail fleſhly tabernacle, unable to ſuſtain the ſhock of jarring elements, be blown down, God, with paternal ſolicitude, will reſcue the ſpiritual inhabitant. He has, indeed, put that good thing within it, which makes its damnation impracticable; — adorned it with the image of God, from which hell would flee away with confuſion, from which glory and joy are inſeparable — kindled in it that celeſtial fire, which when death has done his utmoſt, and the lamp of natural life is extinguiſhed, will dart up above the confinement of mortality and corruption, and like Elijah's fiery chariot, ſeek its native element in the ſkies. — Thrice bleſſed moment to the heaven-born ſoul, however painful the operation whereby its eſcape was effected! — A thouſand angels wait, its convoy to the manſions of bliſs. — The harps of heaven reſound, through all the vaſt domain. — The Deity ſmiles with refulgent brightneſs. — And Jeſus, with love ineffable, welcomes his purchaſe home, "*Come,*

"*bleſſed*

" *bleſſed of my Father, receive the king-*
" *dom prepared for thee, before the founda-*
" *tion of the world*" — Such honour have all who fear the Lord. While we weep for their departure as a loſs to the church, let us rejoice, that they are gone to the Father; remember Jeſus lives; and be followers of them, who, having journeyed through a toilſome world with faith and much patience, at length ſtepped out of the body into heaven, and now inherit the promiſes. — But the final conſummation of their grandeur and magnificence, requires yet to be ſpoken to. *Go forth*, then, *ye daughters of Zion, and* by faith *behold king Solomon*, behold a greater than Solomon, *with the crown*, with which he is *crowned, in the day of his eſpouſals, in the day of the gladneſs of his heart*;[n] behold king Jeſus cometh the ſecond time, attended by myriads of his ſaints. Not one ſoul of them will be wanting, to grace his appearance; and he will find out the mouldered body, tho' mixed with the duſt of the earth, tho' ſcattered into a thouſand places, and tho' it has paſſed through

[n] Canticles iii. 11.

through a thouſand different tranſmutations. Both parts of our frame, purified and renewed, ſhall partake of his triumph. The whole church of the redeemed ſhall be owned, and honourably confeſſed, before the world and holy angels. — The whole church ſhall applaud the righteous judgment of God, upon the impenitent — ſhall with admiration, ſee the myſteries of providence and grace unvailed — ſhall be preſented a glorious church, without ſpot, or wrinkle, or any ſuch thing — and *ſo ſhall be for ever with the Lord.*[o] —— Will he thus regard the children of his love? — Yes. — And he will find out alſo exactly, whether we are of their number or not. The awful inquiſition will take place, to ſeparate the precious from the vile, and determine finally, whether we are Chriſt's, or are reprobates. If ſome, beyond a doubt, have no ſpiritual good thing in them, others may be eſteemed righteous by their neighbours, and yet the ſentiments of Jeſus be contrary — or may have the beſt opinion of themſelves, and the judgment of unerring truth be againſt

[o] 1 Theſſ. iv. 18.

againſt them. And by the deciſion of the laſt day, we muſt ſtand or fall—be received into heaven, or condemned to hell — for ever. Weigh it well, O my ſoul! Bind it about thy neck! Write it upon the table of thine heart! Let it go whither thou goeſt! Let it dwell where thou dwelleſt! *Let it not depart from thine eyes; keep it in the midſt of thine heart!* [p] *Then ſhalt thou underſtand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. That thou mayeſt walk in the way of good* men, *and keep the paths of the righteous,* while *the wicked* are *cut off from the earth, and tranſgreſſors rooted out of it.* [q]

[p] Prov. iv. 21. [q] Prov. ii. 5. 20. 22.

DIS-

DISCOURSE XVIII.

The contented Shunammite.

2 KINGS iv. 13.

—— *And ſhe anſwered,* " *I dwell among* " *my own people.*"

AS people are generally miſtaken, and too eaſily duped, in the moſt neceſſary concern, that of religion, there is no article in which they are more egregiouſly impoſed on, than the road to contentment. It is indeed frequently imagined, to have little or no connection with piety; but people, comparing themſelves with one another, judge the richeſt, the moſt ſelf-ſufficient, the moſt ſenſual, ſtupid or unfeeling, to be the contented. — The truth is, mankind taking their eyes off the Bible, have no ſettled rule to go by, and it is not marvellous, that their

their opinions vary as widely as their tempers, or that the judgment of moſt is erroneous, and ſteers widely from the point. God's word is the alone ſtandard, whereby we can argue the matter with the nicety it deſerves — the preciſion our own happineſs demands; and I have ſelected the good woman in our text, as a very proper example to guide our enquiries on this ſubject. — For, though a woman of like paſſions with ourſelves, ſhe affords us ſome remarks, which illuſtrate the nature of true contentment — direct to the principles from whence it proceeds — and lead to ſome inferences, proper to ſtimulate us to the ſtudy thereof.

I. Preparative to our illuſtration of contentment, from the character of this woman, let us peruſe her hiſtory, as it ſtands in the Bible. —— This chapter informs us that the prophet Eliſha, in the courſe of his travels on the errands of his God, paſſed through Shunem, a city of the tribe of Iſſachar [r] in the land of Iſrael.

[r] Joſhua xix. 18.

Iſrael. Here, it ſeems, a family of fortune and affluence reſided, the miſtreſs of which being piouſly and hoſpitably diſpoſed, entertained the good man in her houſe, and made him ſo welcome, that *as oft as he paſſed by he turned in thither*, to refreſh himſelf. Nay, ſhe carried her generoſity further. That the holy man might be more at his eaſe, ſhe prevailed on her huſband to build him a little chamber, adjoining to the houſe, and furniſh it with ſuch ſmall accommodations, as the prophet, during his tranſient ſtay would want (namely, *a bed, a table, a ſtool, and a candleſtick*) that ſo when he came, he might conſider it as his own apartment, might not have the trouble of aſking for any thing, but retire there, and be as undiſturbed as he wiſhed to be. The next time he came therefore, he was directed to his new lodgings; and, affected by the generoſity of the woman, he ſent his ſervant Gehazi to enquire, "How he ſhould requite all her care "and aſſiduity? *Would ſhe be ſpoken for* "*to the king, or to the captain of the* "*hoſt?* As he had accels to, and ſome "in-

" influence with theſe elevated perſonages, " if ſhe had any favour to ſolicit, he " would do her any ſervice he could." Her anſwer, in the text, implied thus much: " That the reſpect ſhe paid him, " proceeded purely from motives of be- " nevolence and religion — he was a ſer- " vant of God, and as ſuch ſhe loved " him — ſhe was in eaſy circumſtances, " and moreover content — ſhe *dwelt* at " home, in the place of her nativity, and " *among her own people*, and did not " deſire preferment, for herſelf or friends." —— The grateful mind of the venerable prophet was pained at this reply, and he ſaid, " *What then is to be done for her?*" Gehazi anſwered, that there was an attainment no doubt deſired by her; an eſtate depended in the family; her huſband was an old man, and ſhe had no child; which was not only an affliction for the reaſon juſt mentioned, but alſo, that a barren wife was an epithet of ſome reproach, amongſt the Iſraelitiſh ladies. Eliſha, therefore, ordered her to be called; and, as ſhe ſtood in the entrance of the chamber, informed her, that God out of pity,

and

and as a reward for her good-will to his meſſenger, now made ſo little account of in Iſrael, had authorized him to propheſy to her the birth of a ſon, about a year from that date. The Shunammite ſtarted at this intimation, and diſcovered what little credit ſhe gave to it, by expoſtulating with the prophet; and, with that plainneſs and ſincerity which diſdained the language of compliment, begging him not to diſgrace his character and religion by a falſehood, ſurrounded as he was by ſo many, who watched for his halting; "*Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not* "*lie unto thine handmaid.*" But at the time ſpecified ſhe did bear a ſon, who, when grown to boyhood, went out one day in harveſt time, to his father while inſpecting the reapers; there he ſuddenly ſickened, and being carried home, died, and the hopes of the family were blaſted. What uncertain playthings are the enjoyments of this world!—Earthen toys, ſuſpended by the thread of life, a thread at beſt feeble, its ſtrength every moment untwiſting, and which ſuddenly fails, and daſhes the ſuſpended object into a thouſand

ſand pieces! — This was a terrible ſhock to the tender parent. The good woman, however, made no exclamation, but laid the corpſe, as if for the purpoſe of reſt, on the prophet's bed, and, not acquainting her huſband with his ſon's death, deſired an aſs might be ſaddled, and an attendant provided, to convey her to mount Carmel, the abode of the prophet, whither, as ſituated in the territories of the kings of Judah, it is probable ſhe had before reſorted for religious inſtruction. The huſband ſurprized at ſo apparently unſeaſonable a propoſal, enquired into the reaſon, which, unwilling to diſtreſs him, ſhe meekly evaded by anſwering, "It "ſhall be *well.*" Two reaſons, however, may be aſſigned for the motion; one, that ſhe thought he who could exactly foreſee, what was in itſelf improbable, that ſhe ſhould have a ſon, could alſo by his prayers reſtore him; or if otherwiſe, that oppreſſed with grief, ſhe would argue the caſe with Eliſha, concerning his ungenerous treatment of his benefactreſs, in promiſing her a ſon only to take him from her, and piercing her heart with a kind of ſorrow, ſhe was

before

before a ſtranger to. The former is to be collected, from the Apoſtle's ranking her amongſt the *women* who, through faith, *received their dead raiſed to life again*;[a] the latter, from her behaviour on meeting with the prophet; and both together prove, that the faith may be genuine, even where the mind is betrayed into ſome fallies of impatience, which are by no means commendable. — But to proceed. — Set forward according to her deſire, ſhe rode at a great rate. Eliſha perceiving her at a diſtance, and imagining by her ſpeed, that ſomething extraordinary had happened, diſpatched Gehazi to meet her with this meſſage, "Is it *well with thee?*" "Is it *well* "*with thy huſband?*" "Is it *well with* "*the child?*" To whom ſhe anſwered, with the ſame piety and ſubmiſſion that ſhe had before to her huſband, "It is "*well.*" — Being come to the man of God, her heart was overwhelmed at the ſight of him, and in ſilent anguiſh ſhe fell proſtrate at his feet. — Gehazi would officiouſly have thruſt her away; but Eliſha, obſerving the vexation of her mind, forbad

[a] Heb. xi. 35.

forbad him. Upon which ſhe burſt forth in the following pathetic ſtrain: "*Did I* "*deſire a ſon of my Lord?*" — "*Did* "*I not ſay, Do not deceive me?*" — She ſaid no more. — It was enough. — It contained all ſhe wiſhed to ſay; "Hadſt "thou accepted of my benevolence, in "the ſame diſintereſted manner it was "offered — hadſt thou not propoſed a re- "ward, I wanted none. — I thought not "of being a mother. — I deſired no "greater favour here, than to go down "to my grave in peace. — Hadſt thou "not interrupted my quiet, and raiſed my "expectations, if I had never known the "pleaſures of maternal affection, at leaſt, "I had never known, as I now do, the "pangs of a mother's grief." — The prophet's affectionate heart ſwelled with ſympathy, and he firſt ſent his ſervant, to lay his ſtaff upon the child, with a view to his revival; but this expedient (perhaps ſavouring too much of ſelf-importance,[t] and therefore) not ſucceeding, he went himſelf, and after God had tried her patience, the child, upon Eliſha's fervent prayer, was reſtored

[t] Mr. Henry.

ed to the now joyful, and thankful mother. — One ſtory more we read of this excellent woman. Her huſband being dead, by Eliſha's directions, ſhe left Shunem, and ſojourned in the land of the Philiſtines, during a ſcarcity which affected Iſrael ſeven years. Upon reviſiting her native country, ſhe found her poſſeſſions ſeized on by the ſervants of the crown, from whom her only probable appeal was to the king himſelf. But how could ſhe expect juſtice from an adminiſtration, which had forſaken God's worſhip, and abandoned his law—from the ſon of Ahab, that mercileſs robber of Naboth's vineyard? — She truſted in God, and he ſo ordered it, that the king, curious to know the acts of a perſon ſo celebrated as Eliſha, ſent for Gehazi, who, though a leper and diſcarded for his miſconduct, had that reſpect for his former maſter, that he faithfully related the miracles wrought by him, amongſt other facts, rehearſing the ſtory juſt recited. That inſtant alſo, the king ſtood motionleſs at the recital, the woman and her ſon came up to cry for their land. — "If your majeſty demurs

"about

" about the truth of my narration, ſaid " Gehazi, *this is the woman, my lord, O* " *king, and this her ſon whom Eliſha re-* " *ſtored to life.*" Both occurrences met ſo forcibly, that even Jehoram the ſon of Ahab found them irreſiſtible, and without heſitation ordered her to be reinſtated in her inheritance, and the arrears of former years immediately returned.

Now in the aforegoing picture of female heroiſm, there are, methinks, the following features of true contentment — ſatisfaction with the gifts of Providence — a diſpoſition to do good — and reſignation, in the expectation, or actual experience of affliction.

1. Satisfaction with God's diſtributions. — A temper to be diſtinguiſhed from unconcernedneſs how the world goes, and a neglect of providing things honeſt in the ſight of all men. Sloth is not contentment. Tis as diſtant from it, as dulneſs and drunkenneſs from real enjoyment. True contentment is the golden mean between indolence and anxiety; it is to attend to duty, and yet leave the iſſue with the Lord — to ſow the ſeed, and not fret

about the crop — to venture prudently in trade, and be eaſy about the profits thereof. Tis oppoſite, alſo, to that reſtleſs ſpirit, which produces ſo many avaricious ſchemes, to riſe in the world; inſtigated by which people purſue wealth, as if it were their God — ſeem almoſt to have no wiſhes, but that they may add pound to pound, houſe to houſe, field to field — and are miſerable leſt their meaſures ſhould not ſucceed, or their neighbours grow richer than themſelves; one contrivance follows another, with ſcarcely any intermiſſion, and their lives are paſſed, not in the actual poſſeſſion of acquiſitions already made, but the torturing thirſt of more. — The good woman ſaid, in our text, "*I dwell among my own people.*" She was pleaſed with her lot, and had enough. So happy a temperament of mind will be contented with more or leſs. If it has leſs, it will not envy the greater things others have; if more, it will not boaſt, exalt or pride itſelf, in the charity of God's hand; ſo that it does not depend upon the largeneſs of a man's eſtate, or the number of his guineas, but the regu-

regulation of his paſſions; and where the ſoul is in due order, may be enjoyed to as great perfection, in a cottage upon the waſte land, as in the moſt ſplendid city and faireſt palace; yea, has frequently been a placid gueſt under the roof of ruſticity, when fondly courted by titles and dignities, and like a coy miſtreſs has fled from them. —— Again,

2. Inſeparable alſo from contentment, is a delight in doing good. — If the fountain of true pleaſure is opened up in the heart, it cannot be confined there, but will overflow all impediments, and force a paſſage outwards. Whilſt a contented man expreſſes his gratitude to God, the giver of every good and perfect gift, by ſtudying in what way of honour and obedience, the ſtreams of love ſhall revert back to their great origin, he is a citizen of the world, not eaſy without attempting the peace and proſperity of his fellow-mortals, as the Shunammite, ſatisfied with her own ſituation, bethought herſelf of providing ſome decent and comfortable accommodations, for the pious but poor prophet. — True contentment forgives in-

juries, rejoices in rendering good for evil, burns to help the miſerable, does not narrow its benevolence within the limits of its own family or acquaintance, its own party or nation, but (a noble contraſt to thoſe empty pretenſions, that inſincere profeſſion, ſo ingeniouſly ſtruck at by the Apoſtle's ſimilies, of *ſounding braſs*, and *a tinkling cymbal*)[u] like the God of love is merciful to all; and while it more eſpecially regards the houſehold of faith, as members of its own body, all mankind, as far as it can reach, it wiſhes to befriend, rejoicing with them that do rejoice, and weeping with them that weep. He who never knew the pleaſure of doing good to the meaneſt, the vileſt, the moſt inveterate — a pleaſure without the arrogance of meriting from God — a pleaſure without oſtentation before men — a pleaſure for the ſake of doing good — a pleaſure, like that we may ſuppoſe the good Samaritan felt, when he relieved in diſtreſs the man who hated him[w] — he who never partook of this pleaſure, was hitherto never bleſſed with ſolid contentment. — We add,

3. Re-

[u] 1 Cor. xiii. 1. [w] Luke x. 33.

3. Reſignation to the will of God, in the expectation, or actual experience of affliction. — Reſignation does not require, that the mind be ſteeled againſt the ſenſations of pain. That is the acquieſcence of a ſtone, which feels not the foot that kicks it. Reſignation is ſenſible of the affliction, and takes meaſures for its removal, yet ſubmits under it, as long as it is continued. The good woman, in this chapter, ſorrowed deeply for the loſs of her ſon; her grief was unutterable; yet ſhe ſaid, "It is *well*, perfectly *well*, "nothing amiſs, but all as it ſhould be." — Thus Job alſo, in the midſt of his complicated diſtreſs, "*Naked came I out* "*of my mother's womb, and naked ſhall I* "*return thither. The Lord gave, and the* "*Lord hath taken away; bleſſed be the* "*name of the Lord.*" [x] "*What! Shall* "*we receive good at the hand of God, and* "*ſhall we not receive evil?*" [y] — If the hand of God lies heavy — if the affliction is prolonged, yet will reſignation lie at his feet, and leave itſelf at his diſpoſal, to be, to do, to ſuffer all God pleaſes.

 — Let

[x] Job i. 21. [y] Job ii. 10.

—— Let me not be miſunderſtood here, that any one in this ſinful body is entirely of this frame, and finds no murmurings. The Shunammite's expoſtulation with Eliſha betrays ſome repining, as it was the Lord, not Eliſha, who took her ſon from her. Even the patience of Job had its fretful moments, when he *curſed his day*,[z] and, *uttered that* he *underſtood not*; *things too wonderful for* him, *which* he *knew not*.[a] Contentment is a kind of leſſon rather, that God is, by a due courſe of trial and diſcipline, teaching his people. *I have learned*, ſaid the Apoſtle, *in whatſoever ſtate I am*, therewith *to be content*.[b] And as, where the grace is implanted, its exerciſe is aimed at by all God's diſpenſations, ſo where its exerciſe is perceivable, it will be diſcovered by the effects deſcribed. —— And give me leave to enquire,

II. Into the principles from whence it proceeds. —— Will it proceed from ſullen reaſonings on the uncertainty of earthly enjoyments, which therefore are not worthy of our regard? — Will it proceed from urging

[z] Job iii. 1. [a] Job xlii. 3. [b] Phil. iv. 11.

urging the poſſibility of good-luck ſucceeding bad-luck? — Will it be produced by arguing, that all things go on according to one immutable rule, one invariable rotation, and that it is as fooliſh to fret, as it would be to little purpoſe to expect alteration? Such were the ſage documents of philoſophy, to ſooth the mind in trial, and calm the boiſterous agitations of the ſoul. But in vain were they adminiſtered. They buoyed it up painfully between hope and deſpair; or elſe ſunk it into a black, ſtern melancholy, which, brooding over its own darkneſs, gnawed its vitals, becauſe others were not alike wretched. —— *Learn of me*, ſaid the kind Saviour, for *I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye ſhall find reſt unto your ſouls.* [c] Godlineſs alone — religion, infuſed into the heart by the power of Almighty grace, is the parent of that contentment, which brings great gain. —— And

1. One of the principles leading to it, is humility. — And this on two accounts; that we know not what is beſt for us, and are undeſerving of every favour.

[c] Matthew xi. 29.

The proud man is ſelf-ſufficient; he thinks nothing too good for him; he can even dictate to God what to beſtow; and, become vain in his own imagination, no wonder he is ſore all over, and cannot bear the touch of diſappointment. Pride and contentment are as oppoſite qualities, as pride and humility. 'Tis the humble, the lowly mind, whoſe experience tells him how readily his heart is to draw him aſide, how incompetent a judge he is of the propriety of his own choice, how guilty, and unworthy of every gratification, who is thankful and contented. Is God's bounty larger or more ſtinted? The very ſmalleſt bleſſing is above his deſert, and, therefore, he is thankful for all. Is he diſappointed of what his heart was ſet upon? Yet he is taught, that what he viewed as a good might have proved detrimental to him, and, therefore, to be contented with things as they are. Is he in adverſity or diſtreſs? *Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the puniſhment of his ſins?* [d] — Pride magnifies affliction, by viewing it through the aggravating

[d] Lam. iii. 39.

vating medium of its own excellencies. Humility magnifies ſin, by viewing it through the pure medium of God's law, and can even forget the correction, in the painful ſenſe of the faults that occaſioned it. Let the contrite in heart place the glaſs of God's word before his face, and he perceives ſo many blemiſhes, ſo many ſpots of ſin, that the ſcars of trouble appear comparatively few. Of courſe, where this grace hath its due exerciſe, ſin is the ſoreſt grievance, and the ſoul joins the holy Pſalmiſt, in witneſſing for God, *He hath not dealt with us after our ſins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.*[e] Thus attended, tribulation worketh patience. And how remarkably has it happened, in the experience of good people, that the firſt onſet of trial, in an inferiour degree alſo, was reſiſted with impetuoſity, and conſidered as a mighty hardſhip, when the further progreſs of the day of adverſity, by engaging the ſoul to look more into itſelf, has inſtructed it to ſit down and keep ſilence, to bear much greater burdens without

[e] Pſalm ciii. 10.

murmuring. " *Thou haſt chaſtiſed me,* ſaid " Ephraim, *and I was chaſtiſed, as a bul-* " *lock unaccuſtomed to the yoke. Surely after* " *that I was turned, I repented*; *and after* " *that I was inſtructed, I ſmote upon my* " *thigh: I was aſhamed, yea even con-* " *founded,* not becauſe I bore affliction, " but *becauſe I did bear the reproach of* " *my youth.*" [f] Shall I now appeal to thoſe who know this frame of mind perſonally, whether, by huſhing the rebellious riſings of the ſoul againſt God's proceedings, and convincing the conſcience of their impropriety, it does not involve in its very ſelf peace, calmneſs, and tranquility? — Yet further,

2. Another ſource of contentment is a conviction of the majeſty and wiſdom of God — of the majeſty of God, who, therefore, ought not to be reſiſted; — of his wiſdom, who performs every thing with that maſterly ſkill, that none can alter it for the better. —— Hence, dear as Iſaac was to Abraham, yet at the command of the ſupreme Diſpoſer he was devoted to death, and, had God permitted,

[f] Jer. xxxi. 18, 19.

mitted, would actually have been ſlain and ſacrificed. — Hence alſo Eli, warned of the divine judgments upon his family, replied, "*It* is *the Lord, let him do* "*what ſeemeth him good:*" "It cannot "be wrong if God does it."[g] —— Amidſt all the inbred repinings good people complain of, there is alſo within them that holy awe of God moſt High, and impreſſion of his perfect rectitude, that they deſire to ſay, *The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice.*[h] And even in caſes of difficulty, caſes paſt their finding out, they would lie ſtill, and, like Aaron upon the melancholy cataſtrophe of his two ſons, *hold their peace.*[i] — A man thus ſubdued at the footſtool of God's throne, is compoſed when an hurricane blows againſt him. — And more eſpecially is at reſt, when to the former is added,

3. A comfortable perſuaſion that God is his portion. —— *The Lord is my portion, ſaith my ſoul, therefore will I hope in him,*[k] was the conſolation of Jeremiah. The preceding conſiderations may pacify a

[g] 1 Sam. iii. 18. [h] Pſalm xcvii. 1.
[i] Lev. x. 3. [k] Lam. iii. 24.

man, this will cauſe him to exult and ſing, counting it all joy when he falls into divers temptations. Accordingly, when the people of God are filled with high, reverential, and ſubmiſſive ſentiments of his majeſty and wiſdom, to this bleſſing the Lord generally ſuperadds that of a diſcovery of his love, *to revive the ſpirit of the humble, and revive the heart of the contrite ones,*[l] that removed from ſelf-confidence, they may have a ground of ſupport more noble, ſolid, permanent. Hence Paul gave an adequate reaſon for *rejoicing in tribulation,* by ſubjoining, *the love of God is ſhed abroad in our hearts, by the Holy Ghoſt which is given unto us*;[m] and from the abundant aſſurances of the divine regard, he preached to the Hebrews, *Let your converſation be without covetouſneſs, and be content with ſuch things as ye have.*[n] — Thus to argue, "*The Lord is my helper*; "he is my God, who has reconciled me "to himſelf by Jeſus Chriſt, and not "imputed my treſpaſſes unto me; he is "my Father and friend; he has called "me by his grace, juſtified me through "the

[l] Iſaiah lvii. 15. [m] Rom. v. 5. [n] Heb. xiii. 6.

" the blood of his Son, adopted me into
" his family, prepared heaven for me, and
" engaged to beſtow all needful ſupplies
" in the way thither; *I will not*, there-
" fore, *fear*, *what man*, what earth *ſhall*
" *do unto me.* All things are of God,
" conveyed to me from the love of the
" Father, through the love of the Son.
" If my ſhare of this world's good be
" but ſcanty, it is right, it is beſt it
" ſhould be ſo; if it be ſmall it ſhall
" be ſure; *the barrel of meal ſhall not*
" *waſte, neither ſhall the cruſe of oil fail:* [o]
" *I ſhall eat and ſhall leave* thereof. [p]
" Sooner than I ſhould ſtarve, he would work
" miracles in my favour, and from the
" moſt barren and unpromiſing quarters,
" procure the means of my ſupport, as
" he commiſſioned the ravens to feed Eli-
" jah; [q] and if more than a bare ſub-
" ſiſtence would do me good, I ſhould
" have it; if the contrary, I would do
" wrong to covet it. Does God enjoin
" me to take up my croſs? I welcome
" it, as a precious token of my Father's
" love.

[o] 1 Kings xvii. 14. [p] 2 Kings iv. 43.
[q] 1 Kings xvii. 6.

" love. Why ſhould I refuſe it, ſince " Jeſus for me ſo willingly took it up? " — Phyſic is as neceſſary as food, and " my God ſends it, becauſe he knows I " want it, to purge away bad humours, " to take away my ſin. All is well, all " kind, that proceeds from him; he ſpared " not his own Son, but delivered him " up for me, how then ſhall he not with " him, freely give me all things?" — Theſe thoughts received by faith, truſted in, and digeſted in the heart, contain the divine myſtery of contentment; they make life more than tolerable, make it comfortable; they yield the trueſt pleaſure in the fruition of earthly good, for they teach to enjoy all in God; they leſſen the preſſure of grief, and enlighten the dark vale of death. So that if a believer aſks, How is this bleſſed art to be attained? The anſwer is ready; *As* you firſt *received Chriſt Jeſus the Lord, ſo walk in him*;[r] and the greater improvement you make, the more you will poſſeſs of that mind which was in Chriſt Jeſus. — As

[r] Col. ii. 6.

As inferences from the ſubject we learn then,

1. A true idea of the heavenly happineſs. — Contentment, in this world, is a degree of heaven brought down into the ſoul; heaven, in the future world, is contentment wound up to that perfection, as to have no corruption to ſtruggle with, but the whole man to be ſwallowed up of God, to dwell in God, and God in him. A diſpoſition to glorify God and ſubmit to him, is ſo cloſely connected with the peace and repoſe of the heart, that no power can disjoin them. Regularity and order are not more eſſential to the peace of ſociety. Where the former never entered, the latter never reſided. And if in thoſe ſweet moments, Chriſtians, that God's will was done in you, you enjoyed a heaven upon earth, how complete will your felicity be, when that which is perfect takes place of that which is in part — when the light and glory of paradiſe chace away the fogs of unbelief, and the chilling damps of prejudice — when, every faculty of every glorified ſpirit brought into ſubjection to God, and placed upon

upon him its proper object, one ſeraphic flame of love unites the whole celeſtial family, and God is all in all! *As for me, I ſhall behold thy face in righteouſneſs; I ſhall be ſatisfied, when I awake* with *thy likeneſs.*[s] Are we the expectants of this bliſs? Why then ſhould we not dwell upon the thought? Do we expect it to be a bliſs of the ſort deſcribed? Why then not cultivate the temper? Where is the conſiſtency of profeſſing to wait for Chriſt's appearance and kingdom, whilſt the life diſcovers the ſoul to be divided amongſt the cares of the world, and whilſt the affections are ſet on things upon the earth? —— But I forbear. —— From this doctrine we are taught alſo,

2. One main cauſe of that uneaſineſs which has embittered this world. — How few, very few contented people! Alas! How much are the generality their own enemies! They look for ſatisfaction where it never had its abode, and neglect the ſearch where the treaſure is to be found. They are ſelf-tormentors, the ſuicides of their own happineſs. — Soon weary of their choiceſt

[s] Pſalm xvii. 15.

choiceſt delights, toſſed about with the wind of temptation, and eagerly graſping after variety, they are *like the troubled ſea, when it cannot reſt.* [t] — Quickly deprived of their moſt ſubſtantial pleaſures, expoſed to uncertainty and misfortune, and having no God to be the rock of their hope, to what pillar will they betake themſelves, to ſupport their tottering ſouls? They tell you they are contented: Let God aſſume his right, to recall one or two of the indulgences granted them, and their viſionary contentment vaniſhes, and leaves anxiety and vexation behind it. Let the day of trial approach, and they tire — they faint — they die — or they deſpair, and grow outrageous. —— *Doeſt thou well to be angry for* the withering of *the gourd?* [u] If thy heart was fixed upon God, would thy confidence be ſo eaſily ſhattered? State the matter juſtly then, and confeſs you have been miſtaken. If the world, the fleſh and the Devil have hitherto deceived you, give them no further credit, but apply to him who keepeth truth for ever. —— Once more,

3. While

[t] Iſaiah lvii. 20. [u] Jonah iv. 9.

3. While the principles laid down open to us the world of ſpirits, and bring near to the eye of faith the bliſsful regions above, they point out alſo ſome of the cauſes, of the miſery of the condemned below. Pride, diſcontent and deſpair reign in hell for ever. The unregenerate carry in their own boſoms, the ſeeds of their damnation. Were the Almighty to pronounce no other ſentence than, "*Be as* "*you are*," their inſatiable luſts would be the vultures, and conſcience the worm, to gnaw and torment them for ever. Marvel not, then, that it is ſaid unto you, "*Ye muſt be born again*;"[w] to be carnally minded is its own curſe, is death. Be importunate with God for repentance, for pardon, for a change of heart, for ſanctifying grace, for that ſpiritual mind which is life and peace. Without this requiſite Omnipotence could not bleſs you; and when death ſhuts the preſent tranſitory ſcene, no change will ever take place upon you, but he that is filthy will unalterably remain ſo — to eternity. —— *Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatſoever a man*

[w] John iii. 7.

a man ſoweth, that ſhall he alſo reap. For he that ſoweth to his fleſh, ſhall of the fleſh reap corruption; but he that ſoweth to the Spirit, ſhall of the Spirit reap life everlaſting. [x]

[x] Gal. vi. 7, 8.

HYMN.

I.

'TIS God who lifts our comforts high,
Or ſinks them in the grave;
He gives, and (bleſſed be his name!)
He takes but what he gave.

II.

Peace all our angry paſſions then!
Let each rebellious ſigh
Be ſilent at his ſov'reign will,
And every murmur die.

III.

If ſmiling mercy crown our lives,
Its praiſes ſhall be ſpread;
And we'll adore the juſtice too,
Which ſtrikes our comforts dead.

DIS-

DISCOURSE XIX.

Unbelief exemplified and puniſhed.

2 KINGS vii. 2.

Then a lord on whoſe hand the king leaned, anſwered the man of God, and ſaid, "Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?" and he ſaid, "Behold, thou ſhalt ſee it with thine eyes, but ſhalt not eat thereof."

IS there any thing whereof it may be ſaid, "See this is new?" It hath been already of old time before us. The thing that hath been, it is that *which ſhall be; and that which is done* is *that which ſhall be done; and there is no new* thing *under the ſun.*[y] The children of a family do not more reſemble their parents and one

[y] Eccleſ. i. 9, 10.

one another, than the deſcendants of fallen Adam diſcover the features, of their firſt progenitor's apoſtacy. Except the arguments from ſcripture, there cannot be a ſtronger evidence of original corruption, than the invariable prevalence of this depravity, in all nations and ages; ſo that the iniquity now tranſacted in the world, proceeds from the ſame internal principles, and is only a repetition of the ſame iniquity, which former ages were ſpectators of. — Our text affords an example of impiety, which you are ready to ſuppoſe ſingular, and different from any thing that can be committed in our time. I am, on the other hand, to prove, that our ſins are not of a modern date, and particularly that this ſin is practiſed every day — practiſed by perſons, who never ſuſpect they are guilty of it, and is the grand cauſe of all the diſorders now ſubſiſting in the world. To explain and make good this charge, we ſhall relate the whole ſtory, as recited in this and the former chapters.

Benhadad king of Syria, the implacable enemy of Iſrael and Judah, notwithſtanding

ſtanding the benevolence of the king of Iſrael, in feeding and reſtoring to their maſter a Syrian army, which was miraculouſly trepanned into his power, collected a vaſt force, and blockaded Samaria the capital of the ten tribes ſo cloſely, that (their ſupplies cut off, and the proviſions of the country engroſſed by the enemy) the inhabitants were near to periſhing by famine. The ſcarcity was ſo grievous, that an aſs's head was ſold for fourſcore pieces of ſilver,[z] and comparatively happy that man thought himſelf, who poſſeſſed fourſcore pieces of ſilver, to purchaſe an aſs's head. More than this, three quarters of a pint of *dove's dung* (or ſay ſome writers, a ſort of vetches or pulſe, uſed for feeding chickens and doves[a]) was rated at five pieces of ſilver.[b] The rich, who had no money for pleaſure and extravagance, might at a great expence buy a ſcanty ſubſiſtence; but what ſhift did the poor make? A dreadful one they were driven to, of which

[z] Equal to 4l. 11s. 3d. of our money.

[a] Eſſay for a new tranſlation, p. 174—177.

[b] Equal to 5s. 8d. 1 halfpenny.

which a ſingle ſpecimen is a ſufficient token. Two women made an agreement —one was to boil her ſon to be eaten one day, the other the next —The firſt part of the horrid agreement was executed —the tender infant murdered, and feaſted on. —When the turn of the other came, the mother refuſed. —She whom hunger had ſteeled, againſt the common emotions of humanity, who had partook of the ſhocking meal before-mentioned, could not ſubdue the yearnings of the mother—ſhe hid her ſon; and the former woman was ſo enraged, that ſhe cried unto the king, to force the fond mother, to yield up her child to be killed—The appeal was dreadful —The king was frightened, and went into deep mourning; but inſtead of being humbled before God, and entreating his kind relief, in an ecſtaſy of impatience he exclaimed, "*This evil is of the Lord*; "*Why ſhould I wait for the Lord any* "*longer?*" and would fain have deſtroyed the prophet Eliſha, either that he ſuppoſed him to have been acceſſary to the famine, or becauſe he did not inform him, by what means it could be removed.

The

The king, the fountain of honour, being ſo abandoned, no wonder his great men were alſo wicked. That lord of whom the text ſpeaks, was the favourite of his ſovereign. Eliſha entered the palace, with a meſſage from God. He was well-known to be divinely commiſſioned, and the words he ſpoke never failed. The meſſage he brought amounted to this, "That "though God had thus ſeverely tried "the people, and juſtly might, for their "heinous tranſgreſſions, have left them "to periſh, yet he pitied them—he was "God, who mixed mercy with wrath, not "man, whoſe tender mercies are cruelty; "and therefore by that time to-morrow, "corn ſhould be ſo plentiful in Sama-"ria, that at leaſt, conſidering the pre-"ſent ſituation of their affairs, they "would reckon the price cheap."—The fulfilment, according to appearances at that time, was highly improbable. But what is impoſſible with God? "If, ſaid "this prophane nobleman, *the Lord would* "*make windows in heaven*, and rain down "corn from the clouds, *then*, and not other-"wiſe, *might this thing be.*" "*Thou ſhalt*

"*ſee*

" *ſee it with thine eyes*, anſwered Eliſha, " *but ſhalt not eat thereof.*" And both predictions came to paſs, exactly as the prophet foretold. — In how eaſy and familiar a manner, does the ſtory relate the completion of the former, and get over the impoſſibility objected to it! — Four miſerable wretches, afflicted with the leproſy, were ſhut out of the city, yet abode at the entry of the gate. — Their caſe was deſperate. — " *Why ſit we here* " *until we die?*" they argue with one another. — " *If we ſay we will* ſolicit en- " trance *into the city, then the famine is* " *in the city*, and they who have not " enough for their own ſupport, will hardly " contribute to our relief, ſo that *we* " *ſhall die there; and if we ſit ſtill here,* " *we die alſo.*" — What do they reſolve upon? — To throw themſelves into the hands of the Syrians, that if devoted to death, they might be inſtantly diſpatched, and put out of their pain; yet preſuming upon the poſſibility, that compaſſion might dwell in an heathen breaſt, and ſome ſmall matter might be thrown them to eat. " *If they ſave us alive*, they ſay,

" *we ſhall live*; *and if they kill us we* " *ſhall but die.*" — Before day-break, accordingly, they roſe up, and advanced to the Syrian camp. But there they found every thing ſolitary — not a ſingle man to be ſeen. — The horſes and aſſes were tied to the ſtalls, but forſaken by their owners. It ſeems the Lord had, in the night, cauſed a vaſt rumbling to be heard in the air; miſtaking which for an army in full march, and concluding that the Hittites and Egyptians were approaching to ſuccour Iſrael, the troops of Syria, leſt they ſhould be hemmed in and cut to pieces, fled with ſuch rapidity, that they left their tents ſtanding, and their beaſts as they had put them up the preceding night. —— The lepers eat and drank to the full; nor are they herein blameable. But, unmindful of communicating the glad tidings for the publick benefit, they ſelfiſhly conſulted how to make for themſelves, the greateſt advantage of their diſcovery. Firſt, they went, deliberately, into one tent, and chuſing the moſt valuable articles, carried them, not unlikely ſome miles off, and hid them. Next, they rifled another tent,

tent, and disposed of the gold, the silver and apparel, the same way. — Mean time, Samaria was giving up the ghost for want of bread; — her sons lay dead in her streets — the sucking child drew the breast of a departed mother — or the knife was at its throat, that it might become the sustenance of its parents. — Yet the lepers *went into one tent, and carried thence silver, and gold, and raiment, and went and hid it — and came again — and entered into another tent — and carried thence* also — *and went and hid it.* —— To do them justice, however, when they had gratified their own cravings, they generously recollected, that it would not be right to monopolize the good news, and *self*, moreover, suggested, that they would probably bring mischief upon their own heads, by concealing it. They went, therefore, and informed the porter at the gate. The king suspected at first, as well he might, that it was a deep-laid scheme of the Syrians, by the lure of food to decoy out the inhabitants, and take the city, whilst the people were greedily devouring the provisions. But dispatching the two

only ſerviceable horſes remaining, to make enquiry, intelligence was brought, that all the roads to the river Jordan, were ſtrewed with the garments and veſſels, the Syrians had caſt away in their fright, and that not a Syrian was to be ſeen in the country. Upon which the ſoldiery ruſhed out and ſpoiled the enemy's tents, and the barley and fine flour were ſold in the gate of Samaria, at the price ſpecified by Eliſha. —— Further, to prevent riot, and that the people might be regularly ſupplied, it was found neceſſary to guard the gate, which opened to the camp of Syria. The lord, therefore, on whom the king leaned, was appointed over this gate. But the people were hungry, and not to be kept within bounds; — the lord and his ſervants ſtrove, and the people ſtrove, till the latter prevailed, and, in the tumult, trod him under their feet, that he died, as the man of God had ſaid unto him, "*Thou ſhalt ſee* the plenty *with* "*thine eyes, but ſhalt not eat thereof.*" —— Let us now,

I. En-

I. Enquire into the nature of the crime, this lord was guilty of; which will lead us

II. To conſider his puniſhment.

I. Wherein conſiſted the crime, of which this lord was guilty? — In contradicting the declaration of God by his prophet. "To-morrow, about this time, there ſhall "be plenty in Samaria," ſaid Eliſha — "If the Lord would rain down corn "from heaven, then ſhall this thing be," ſaid the nobleman; plainly intimating, that he did not credit one word of the prophet's ſpeech, and in a vein of ridicule pronouncing him a falſe prophet, who deceived the people. This crime is called in ſcripture *unbelief*, the guilt of which was, that it gave the lie to the veracity of Almighty God; for *he that believeth not God, hath made him a liar.*[c] And will it now be difficult to prove, that this is a ſpecies of guilt ſtill very commonly contracted? The attacks of infidelity, upon the ſacred oracles, are ſo exactly to my purpoſe, that merely to mention them is to fix the charge. But

[c] 1 John v. 10.

infidelity may receive countenance in hearts, which flattery preſumes to be free from it. —— God's Providence directs the affairs of the world wiſely, and for the welfare of the many who are governed thereby. —— "We believe it," you ſay. — Do you? — Why then are you ſo fretful, when God croſſes your inclinations — why ſo angry, when you have not all your wiſhes — why ſo envious, when your neighbour gains more of the world than yourſelves — why ſo inflamed, when you meet with loſſes, trials, and diſappointments? Does this conduct evidence your reſignation to God's diſpenſations, and that you certainly believe what God does is beſt? Good people diſcern enough of this rebellious ſpirit in themſelves, to cauſe humility and lamentation. Souls unregenerate are ſubject to its dominion, but not aware of its ſway, point their murmurings at Providence for defeating their deſigns, when they ought to be directed to their own folly, for truſting in things unſubſtantial. —— Again, God has ſent us his holy word, and therein threatened, *The ſoul*

ſoul that ſinneth it ſhall die.[d] When he aſſured us, that a corporal death would be the fruit and effect of ſin, from uniform obſervation we are confirmed in the expectation. — Is not his word equally to be depended on when he adds, *but after this the judgment*;[e] and *the wrath of God cometh upon the children of diſobedience?*[f] But how few are perſuaded of the truth, of theſe awful denunciations? If you really gave them the credit they deſerve, would you reſt a moment without prayer, to be ready for judgment, and to eſcape this puniſhment? — Would you delight in ſin, which is ſo hateful and injurious, which will deſtroy your ſouls for ever? Would you hug it in your boſoms, and be loath to part with it? — Would you live thoughtleſs, careleſs about futurity, and treat with diſregard that weighty buſineſs, on which are ſuſpended eternal felicity or woe? —— What thoughts do you entertain of the malefactor, who paſſes away the time between ſentence and execution, in drinking and carouſing, in diverſion and diſſipation? You do not heſi-

[d] Ezek. xviii. 4. [e] Heb. xi. 27. [f] Eph. v. 6.

tate to aſſert, that he is exceedingly hardened. But in what reſpect do you differ from him? The ſentence of God's law, for your offences, hangs over your guilty heads — death has received his orders to cut you down — the axe is laid to the root of the tree — a life of vanity, and unconcern about religion, always tended down to a death of ſorrow — and yet this vain life characterizes your days, your weeks, your months, your ſucceſſive years. — If eternal things are confeſſedly of the laſt importance, why not be ſerious about them? — What is the reaſon, that they are undervalued as mere trifles, the deriſion of the multitude, the diſregard of almoſt all?—Mankind believe not God. —— Nor has the Moſt High threatened only, and explicitly laid down theſe threatenings for the alarm of the unconverted, but alſo provided a free and complete ſalvation; ſuited it moſt admirably to the ſeveral exigencies of our ſouls; to us is the word of this ſalvation ſent; in our ears it is continually preached — repentance and reconciliation with God — remiſſion of ſins that are paſt,

paſt, however flagrant — peace of conſcience — a new heart and a right ſpirit — divine communications to adorn the ſoul, and train it up for heaven — all this, I ſay, is preached unto you from ſabbath to ſabbath; but is it not clear that people diſbelieve God's word, when they refuſe even to hear it — when, if they hear, they make haſte to forget it — or ſuppoſe it to be the matter of every one's concern but their own — when their whole time is waſted, in the purſuit of folly and pleaſure; or, to ſay the beſt, ſpent in the eager engroſſment of a periſhing wealth, whilſt the precious ſoul is defrauded of that ſpiritual riches, which would make its immortality a bleſſing? — Chriſt Jeſus tells you, *Where your treaſure is, there will your heart be alſo*; and that *Ye cannot ſerve God and mammon.*[g] *If any man love the world*, ſaith an Apoſtle, *the love of the Father is not in him.*[h] Now if this was believed, would the actions of men ſo palpably contradict the teſtimony of God? Certainly not. Oppoſite effects muſt proceed from oppoſite cauſes.

[g] Mat. vi. 21. 24. [h] 1 John ii. 15.

Faith was always the root of ſincere and acceptable obedience; and diſobedience is as naturally the fruit of unbelief. Behold, how hearty the aſſent of ſinners to what Satan ſuggeſts, and how unconſtrainedly they follow his dictates! He ſaith to one, Go, and he goeth; to another, Come, and he cometh; to a third, Do this, and he doeth it. If God's word were but as firmly relied on, would not men diſcover the ſame freedom in ſerving him? With what facility does Satan tempt to ſin! With what ſucceſs does the depraved heart perſuade, that religion is hard and unpleaſant, that a ſmall portion of it will ſuffice, or a little ſerioufneſs, in the very refuſe of life, atone for years devoted to wickedneſs! On the other hand, God ſpeaketh once, yea twice; he hath given line upon line, and precept upon precept, as the means of conviction, that iniquity leads to ruin, but to be truly religious is to be bleſſed for ever; yet men regard it not. Which, let me aſk, do they believe? Do they not act, as if God ſpoke a falſehood, and Satan the alone truth? Wonder not then, at the example in the text;

it

it is only one out of many thouſands. Look within and examine, whether the ſame ſpirit of infidelity does not reign in your own breaſts. —— Shall I turn now to you, to whom it has been given of God, in a meaſure to believe, and embrace theſe things, and aſk whether, notwithſtanding all you have been taught, there are not working within you alſo, ſad remains of unbelief? Whence otherwiſe ariſe thoſe forbidding thoughts, that you ſhall be caſt off? Whence thoſe doubts of your heavenly Father's love? Whence thoſe ſuſpicions of his goodneſs and faithfulneſs? Whence thoſe ſorrows, thoſe tears? You ſay, your unworthineſs diſtreſſes you. — So it ought. — You ſay, it is the cauſe of your diſcouragement; and I grant it would be unſurmountable, if you had no authority to look further. But if the goſpel invites the moſt unworthy, to apply for mercy and grace; if the goſpel repreſents the chief of ſinners, as within the reach of that mercy; if the promiſe of the goſpel runs, *Aſk, and ye ſhall receive; ſeek, and ye ſhall find; knock, and*

it ſhall be opened unto you;[1] if, of thoſe who have valued and ſought God's mercy, and have even been ſuffered to wait long for the aſſurance thereof, not one, after all, met with a final repulſe; to make our unworthineſs a bar to our truſt in Chriſt, and patiently waiting for the diſcovery of his love, proceeds not from humility, but contradicts God's word, and is the offſpring of unbelief. —— Thus having, I hope, made good the fact, let me, in the

II. Place, call your attention to the puniſhment annexed. —— Seemingly caſual as was the death, of the elevated perſonage our text ſpeaks of, yet taken in the connection, it cannot, as the completion of a poſitive prediction, be properly regarded otherwiſe, than as a judgment inflicted. — Is it thought diſproportionate to his offence? Duly weigh the inſult offered to God's greatneſs and holineſs. Are the ſhining hoſts of heaven proſtrate at his nod? And ſhall a puny mortal, a worm of the earth, dare to diſpute his word?

[1] Mat. vii. 7.

word? — Reflect alſo on the rank of the guilty perſon, and the almoſt contagious influence of infidelity amongſt the great, in diffuſing a contempt of God through the lower orders of the people, as well as its tendency, to diſpirit the inhabitants of Samaria, to drown them in deſpair, to excite to mutiny, at a criſis in which every expedient was neceſſary, to preſerve the peace of the city, and a promiſe of food was given, to revive the drooping ſpirits of the people, and animate to a quiet and patient expectation of deliverance, from their preſent diſmal ſituation: — If the whole is ſummed up, God will appear righteous, in this diſtinguiſhed example of the puniſhment of unbelief. And is the obſervation impertinent, that the ſentence pronounced by the prophet contains, moreover, a reſemblance of the manner, wherein unbelief, in every caſe, meets with a juſt retribution? — "*Thou* "*ſhalt ſee* it *with thine eyes, but ſhalt* "*not eat thereof.*" — Aſk the Chriſtian, whoſe faith is weak, whoſe hopes are low, whoſe heart is, in any meaſure, under the bias of unbelief — aſk him, Whether it does

does not diſcompoſe his mind, and fill him with dread, deſpondency, anxiety? — Aſk him, Why, at ſome ſeaſons, he can rejoice in God through our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, but, at other ſeaſons, he is dark, beclouded, and uncomfortable? — Aſk him, Whence he has endured ſome heavy trials unmoved, whilſt other leſſer inconveniences have caſt down, and overwhelmed him? — Aſk him, How it happens, that whilſt he ſees other Chriſtians happy, in feeding upon the free grace of the goſpel, he finds himſelf unable to taſte thereof? — He will anſwer, agreeably to an obſervation before hinted at, that faith overcometh the world, is a cordial to the ſpirits, and ſtrength to the inward man; whereas unbelief is that enervating malady, which ſin has incorporated with our frame, and which, when prevalent, palſies the whole ſoul, that it cannot reach out its arm, to lay hold of the bleſſings in its view. Are we not then benevolently cautioned, to *take heed leſt there be in any of us, an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God?* [k] —— Survey the buſy

[k] Heb. iii. 12.

buſy tribes of mankind, eager in ſearch of ſomething, to fill up that vacancy they feel within them. What is the reaſon, that having ranged through nature's delights, to the very extent of their faculties, in queſt of ſolid pleaſure, ſtill their cry is, "*Who will ſhew us* any *good?*" — They believe not what God the Lord has ſpoke. Therefore, at the time that a believer (when faith has its lively exerciſe I mean) rejoices in Jeſus, the pearl of great price — poſſeſſes in him ſo ſuitable a portion, that he lacks nothing, for the entertainment of his meditations, or the enrichment of his heart, and his ſatisfaction may be perceived, by the compoſure of his countenance, the ſpiritual chearfulneſs of his converſation, and the ſteadineſs of his walk in the road of religion, theſe are joys that unbelievers intermeddle not with; *they have ſown the wind, and ſhall reap the whirlwind; it hath no ſtalk, the bud ſhall yield no meal;*[1] and though Wiſdom *hath furniſhed her table, and crieth upon the higheſt places of the city,* "*Come, eat of my bread, and drink* "*of*

[1] Hoſea viii. 7.

" *of the wine I have mingled*;" [m] by rejecting her merciful invitation, they remain empty in the midſt of fulneſs, and ſtarve in the midſt of plenty. —— The tranſactions of the unſeen world will afford us, a more ample and terrible exemplification, of the ſame reſemblance. Were the Iſraelites, who upon the return of the ſpies murmured againſt the Lord, and would have ſtoned Moſes, condemned to fall in the wilderneſs? Was the decree irrevocable, that they ſhould ſee the pleaſant land afar off, but never enter on it? [n] *They could not enter in*, it is ſaid, *becauſe of unbelief*. [o] The ſtory is left on record to warn us alſo, that Canaan being typical of heaven, reigning unbelief will exclude, likewiſe, from that reſt which remains for the people of God. And ſhall I now call up to your recollection, the heart rending ſigh of the rich man, when on lifting up his eyes in hell, and recognizing Lazarus in Abraham's boſom, he preſented this piteous, this hopeleſs requeſt, " *Father Abraham, have mercy on* " *me, and ſend Lazarus, that he may dip* " *the*

[m] Prov. ix. 5. [n] Num. xiv. 29. [o] Heb. iii. 19.

" *the tip of his finger in water, and cool*
" *my tongue; for I am tormented in this*
" *flame.*" [p] He ſaw enough to convince him, that religion was deſirable; enough to aggravate his pains, by a compariſon of his own dark and horrible abode, with that unfading ſplendour, which to him muſt ever be *afar off.* —— What alſo will your ſenſations be, ſinners, if, when you are ſpectators of the glory of the righteous, in the great day — when you are the witneſſes of their triumph — of the complacency with which Chriſt regards them, the honour he puts upon them, you have each the doleful reflection to make upon yourſelves, " I have neither part nor lot in " this matter?" — You will ſee it with your eyes, but not taſte thereof. —— As then ye fear ſhame and everlaſting contempt — as ye dread the weeping and wailing of the infernal gulph, look up to the God of grace, who claims it as his own prerogative to beſtow faith, and entreat, that convinced of ſin, becauſe you have not believed on the Son of God, and tracing all your former iniquities

[p] Luke xvi. 24.

ties to this depraved ſource, you may reſign yourſelves up to Jeſus, and believe unto the ſaving of the ſoul. *Theſe words are true and faithful*, the words of the *Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end*, " *I will give unto him that is athirſt*, " *of the water of life freely. He that* " *overcometh ſhall inherit all things, and I* " *will be his God, and he ſhall be my ſon.*" *But the fearful, and unbelieving*, who prefer this world to God, ſhall be ranked with *the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and ſorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars*, who *ſhall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimſtone, which is the ſecond death.* [q]

[q] Rev. xxi. 5.——8.

DIS-

DISCOURSE XX.

Hazael's ſelf-confidence.

2 KINGS viii. 13.

—— "*But what?* — Is *thy ſervant* "*a dog, that he ſhould do this great* "*thing?*"

SHOULD my text ſtrike you with any peculiarity in the ſound — ſhould it be a matter of curioſity, What ſubject of improvement can be ſtarted from ſuch a clauſe? at the time that I wiſh it may engage your attention, I beg leave to premiſe, that it is far from my intention to chuſe a text, in order to excite an unmeaning ſtare — ſtill leſs to force the irreverent ſmile; I have a more weighty and ſolemn reaſon, even to caution you, againſt the deceitfulneſs of the heart, and the hardening nature of ſin. — The words

words are a proper introduction to my deſign, becauſe they lead to a remarkable ſtory in point. —— A larger meaſure of the Spirit, with which Elijah was endowed, having reſted on the head of his companion and ſucceſſor Eliſha, many miracles wrought, and prophecies delivered by him, are recorded in this book; which being chiefly in favour of Judah and Iſrael, Benhadad king of Syria, then at war with the latter, was ſo hurt by the diſcoveries made through him, of the ſecrets of the cabinet-council of Syria, that he ſent horſes, and chariots, and an army, to Dothan, to apprehend the prophet and take him priſoner. — The miraculous blindneſs, with which theſe troops were ſmitten on that occaſion (ſo as not to perceive their danger, till they were brought defenceleſs into the very heart of Samaria) together with the generous treatment of Eliſha, in feeding inſtead of ſlaughtering theſe men, in reſtoring them unhurt to their maſter, wrought ſo upon the mind of Benhadad, that even when he heard of his being at Damaſcus, the capital of Syria, and though the Syrians had juſt before been obliged,

obliged, with terrour and precipitation, to raiſe the ſiege of Samaria, he took no revenge, but was rather diſpoſed to make the prophet his friend. There was alſo another inducement, to wiſh for the friendſhip of one, he ſuppoſed ſo prevalent an advocate with God, that he was himſelf ſick, at this time. Anxious for his health — too ambitious, or too conſcious of guilt, to be willing to die, he had an inſtance in his own court, of the efficacy of Eliſha's prayers. The cure of Naaman's leproſy, indeed, was ſo ſignal, and of ſuch public fame, that it could not be readily forgot. Accordingly the king ſent Hazael, a general of his army and next to himſelf in rank, to enquire about the probability of his recovery. This is the ſame Hazael, who was, at the command of God by Elijah, anointed king of Syria, after the demiſe of Benhadad, who probably had no iſſue.[r] It would be a horrid miſrepreſentation of that appointment, however, to ſuppoſe it a warrant for murdering his ſovereign. David was anointed by Samuel, king of Iſrael, in the place of Saul,

[r] 1 Kings xix. 15.

Saul, but he never underſtood it as giving him liberty, to remove Saul out of the way, in order to obtain the crown. Nor does it appear, that Hazael had formed any ſuch plot, before the inſtant we are now to ſpeak of. — At his lord's command he waited upon Eliſha. In obedience to his orders, he carried alſo a preſent to the man of God — yea, willing to offer a large bribe, he took *even of every good thing of Damaſcus, forty camels burden.* And behold the ſubmiſſive, cringing manner, in which the meſſage of this once haughty monarch, is delivered to the humble prophet; Hazael ſtood before him and ſaid, "*Thy ſon Benhadad, king of* "*Syria, hath ſent me to thee, ſaying, Shall* "*I recover of this diſeaſe?*" —— By how many different methods, can God ſtain the glory of man! Benhadad, a great king, is here reduced to the ſtate of a beggar! — Health was a bleſſing, all his riches and honours could not compenſate the loſs of. — A while ago the imperious tyrant, who aimed at the deſtruction of Eliſha, he is now his abject ſupplicant! Neither let us *boaſt of to-morrow, for we know*

know not what a day may bring forth.[•] — "*Thy ſon* Ben-adad hath ſent me unto "thee, ſaying, *Shall I recover of this diſ-* "*eaſe?*" — The prophet replied, "*Go,* "*ſay unto him, thou mayeſt certainly reco-* "*ver.*" —— "*Nevertheleſs,* added he to "Hazael, *the Lord hath ſhewed me, that* "*he ſhall ſurely die*;" intimating, that his diſorder was not mortal, nor yet his death diſtant. — "By what means was he "to die?" it may be aſked. — This the ſequel will diſcloſe. — Eliſha having reported his meſſage, fixed his eyes ſo ſtedfaſtly upon Hazael, that "the man of "God, with the teſtimony of a good "conſcience, outfaced the man of war," who had met legions undaunted. — The feelings of the pious prophet's heart, moreover, were ſo ſtrong, that he could not contain them — *he wept* — the tears trickled plentifully, down his reverend cheeks. — Hazael was aſhamed. — "*Why* "*weepeth my lord?*" he ſaid. —— "Rea-"ſon enough, anſwered Eliſha: — with "me the world will ſoon be over, and "I ſhall be depoſited in my native duſt.

"But

[•] Prov. xxvii. 1.

" But ah, my country! — My kindred!
" — My brethren according to the fleſh!
" — I know, good-natured as thou now
" appeareſt, *I know the evil that thou wilt*
" *do unto the children of Iſrael; their ſtrong-*
" *holds wilt thou ſet on fire, and their young*
" *men wilt thou ſlay with the ſword, and*
" *wilt daſh their infants* againſt the ſtones,
" *and rip up their women with child.*" ——
" *But what?* replied Hazael, — Sure
" thou miſtakeſt my character — *Is thy*
" *ſervant a dog, that he ſhould do this*
" *great thing?* I am not mercileſs as a
" brute, to be guilty of crimes ſo enor-
" mous." —— The prophet added, that the Lord had ſhewed him he would be king of Syria, without taking notice of the manner of his becoming ſo. It is probable, indeed, that he was generally conſidered, as the heir apparent to the throne, by the eaſe with which he afterwards aſcended it; and the words of the prophet might be a tacit reproach, of the cruel project which now entered into his heart, in like manner as our Lord reproached Judas, upon his departure to betray

betray him, "*That thou doeſt, do quickly.*"[t] But this, as in the caſe of Judas, did not ſtop Hazael from executing his wicked purpoſe. Having entertained a ſecret hope, poſſibly, that Eliſha would pronounce the diſorder incurable, and being diſappointed, inſtigated by ambition and aided by Satan, he went home, and modelled the prophet's anſwer, ſo as to impoſe upon his lord's credulity. — The king believed him. — He had implicit confidence in the words of ſo faithful, ſo affectionate, a favourite. — He ſlept — and waked no more. — The treacherous ſervant, before morning, took a thick cloth — dipped it in water — ſpread it over the face of his ſovereign — and ſtifled him to death. — No external marks of violence were perceived. —— There was hardly opportunity, for the prophet's aſſurance of the king's recovery to be made publick. — Every one thought his death natural. — And, by univerſal conſent, Hazael reigned in his ſtead. — Lord, what is man, when left to himſelf! — This very Hazael alſo, from a grudge againſt Ju-

[t] John xiii. 27.

dah and Iſrael, irritated perhaps alſo, by the freedom Eliſha took with him, in the above-mentioned interview, ſufficiently verified the whole of the prophet's prediction. He haraſſed Iſrael, and *ſmote them in all their coaſts.*[u] He *deſtroyed* their army, that he *made them like the duſt by threſhing.*[w] Yea, he *ſet his face to go up againſt Jeruſalem,*[x] and only deſiſted from the enterprize, on receiving the treaſures and conſecrated veſſels, out of the houſe of the Lord. — And this Hazael — after all his barbarity — died a natural death, in his bed. — Myſterious Providence! How inſcrutable thy proceedings! —— But his impiety and inhumanity were retaliated upon his poſterity, alike wicked with himſelf. — *I will ſend a fire into the houſe of Hazael, which ſhall devour the palaces of Benhadad; I will break alſo the bars,* or fortifications, *of Damaſcus, and cut off the inhabitant from the plain of Aven, and him that holdeth the ſceptre from the houſe of Eden, and the people of Syria ſhall go into capti-*

[u] 2 Kings x. 32.

[w] Amos i. 3. compared with 2 Kings xiii. 7.

[x] 2 Kings xii. 18.

captivity, ſaid the Lord;[y] which prophecy was fulfilled, when *Tiglath-Pileſer*, king of Aſſyria, took Damaſcus, carried the people thereof captive to Kir, ſlew Rezin their king, and annexed the kingdom to his own monarchy, afterwards that vaſt empire, of which Babylon was the capital.[z]

The inſtructions we draw, from this inſtance of human depravity, are, "That "ſin lies ſo deeply concealed in the heart, "puts on ſo many flattering diſguiſes, "and is, at the ſame time, ſo reſtleſs, "that mankind know not the moment "they may be attacked by it, to what "ſins be tempted, or how far a compliance "may lead them." — From whence we naturally infer, "That thoſe perſons are, "like Hazael, in the greateſt danger, "who are leaſt aware of that danger; "and conſequently, the neceſſity, of being "properly fortified againſt temptation." —— The

I. Is ſupported by numberleſs proofs, from ſcripture and common experience. —

[y] Amos i. 4. [z] 2 Kings xvi. 9.

If our firſt parents were tempted and fell, much greater is the danger, of their degenerate offspring. To teach us, that even good people may fall into ſin, ſome of the moſt notorious examples of the kind, were committed by ſuch as theſe. And if they who poſſeſs the grace of God, and are made ſpiritually acquainted with him — if they are not abſolutely ſecured, from miſtakes and declenſions, to what acts of iniquity may not thoſe men be driven, who ſerve in the drudgery of Satan? — Becauſe the Lord has promiſed, that his ſaints ſhall not be finally impenitent, or everlaſtingly ſeparated from his affection, it was never meant, that there is not a difference between right and wrong — it was never meant, to preclude the importance of being warned againſt the latter — it was never meant, that the beſt may not go out of the road of duty — it was never meant, that if they forſake God's way, they ſhall not feel the bitterneſs of their deviations. — Moſt certainly, they will be brought to a ſad, a doleful repentance. Their very ſalvation includes, an affecting ſenſe of their paſt miſ-

miſconduct. And God has many painful methods of chaſtening them he loves, tho' his pity is unchangeable — he will not finally deſert them. —— Let us conſult the divine oracles, not to draw arguments for carnal indulgences, from the errors of the godly, but to conſider them, as ſo many beacons, to warn us of the ſhoals, the quickſands, we alſo are liable unto. —— Would any one have expected that Noah, who, as a preacher of righteouſneſs, ſo faithfully remonſtrated, againſt the violence and debauchery of the Antediluvians — Noah, who ſo lately ſaw the wonders of God in the great deep, and his vengeance executed upon a guilty world — Noah, who was himſelf the ſubject of a miraculous deliverance, from this wrath — that he ſhould ſoon forget the commands, of his preſerver and God? Yet *Noah began to be an huſbandman, and he planted a vineyard, and he drank of the wine, and was drunken,*[a] to a degree of intoxication that was ſhameful. —— Who would have imagined that Lot, who zealouſly ſignalized himſelf in the cauſe of

[a] Gen. ix. 20, 21.

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[a] Gen. ix. 20, 21.

purity and religion — whoſe righteous ſoul was vexed, with the impieties of Sodom — who even dared the reſentment of the whole city, in defence of the rights, of hoſpitality and virtue — that he ſhould himſelf be miſled, firſt into drunkenneſs, then to inceſt? yet both crimes were repeatedly committed; and are perpetuated on ſacred record, to teach us the danger of being ſurprized, and that he who ventures over the precipice of vice, knows not how deep he may plunge, into the flood below, as one ſin is the avenue to another, and the ſmalleſt may be to the greateſt. —— The piety and humanity of David are celebrated in ſcripture-hiſtory. How amiable his behaviour towards Saul, whoſe ſucceſſor, we obſerved, he was nominated, by the Almighty Diſpoſer, of the crowns and ſceptres of the world! He took no ſteps, to alienate the minds of his ſubjects. —— Unjuſtly conſpired againſt, he reſiſted not. — Purſued, he fled. — So great was his regard and compaſſion for the infatuated king, that even when in his power, and the advantage over him was ſo remarkable, that perſons

ſons more aſpiring, and leſs conſcientious, would have preſſed Providence into their ſervice — would have ſlain their enemy, and ſaid (as David's ſervants argued upon that occaſion) "*The Lord hath delivered* "*him into mine hand.*" But David had too feeling an heart, to lift up his hand, againſt the life of his father-in-law and king. He found him aſleep, and his guards equally inſenſible. He only cut off the ſkirt of his robe, and for that his heart *ſmote him.*[b] What a picture of filial piety, of loyalty, of benevolence! Could the life of David be ſtained, by an action of a contrary nature? — But how enſnaring is ſin! Who is too ſecure from it? — David was advanced to the throne, *and it came to paſs*, one unhappy evening, *that David aroſe from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's houſe; and from the roof, he ſaw a woman waſhing herſelf; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon; and David ſent and enquired after the woman; and one ſaid,* "*Is not* "*this Bathſheba, the daughter of Eliam,* "*the wife of Uriah the Hittite?*" *And*

[b] 1 Sam. xxiv. 5.

David ſent meſſengers and took her, and lay with her; [c] to conceal the guilt of which adultery, after a variety of the meaneſt contrivances, beneath the man — beneath the king, he effected the death of her huſband, and took her to himſelf. [d] —— Ah! Did he not advert, that God ſaw, though the nation was ignorant? It was a fault which, though forgiven, produced the moſt pungent grief in David's ſoul; and he is handed down for our admonition, that we may not be high-minded, but fear. —— Further, poſſeſſed as Solomon, the ſon of David and Bathſheba, was, of wiſdom ſuperiour to any in his time, with the miſcarriage alſo, of his father and mother before his eyes, the preſumption would have been unpardonable, that he ſhould forſake his God. But from his own experience he cautions us, *If ſinners entice thee, conſent thou not.* [e] Even

[c] 2 Sam. xi.

[d] If the reader obſerves any ſameneſs, between the reflections here and in Diſ. XVI. he will readily excuſe it, if he reflects on the impropriety, of omitting in this diſcourſe, ſo palpable an example of human frailty.

[e] Prov. i. 10.

Even Solomon, who, in preference to all other kings, was pitched upon to build the houſe of the Lord — Solomon, the darling of his people, and the delight of heaven — Solomon, to whom the Lord *appeared twice*, and gave the moſt ample proof mortality could bear, that he was the alone true God — Solomon's heart *was turned away after other gods; and he went after Aſhtoreth the goddeſs of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites, and built an high place for Chemoſh, the abomination of Moab, in the* very *hill* too, *that* was *before Jeruſalem; and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon; and likewiſe did he for all his ſtrange wives, which burned incenſe, and ſacrificed unto their gods.* — How did they reproach his indifference, by ſcrupulouſly adhering to the worſhip of their falſe deities, whilſt he, out of complaiſance to them, ſhamefully deſerted the true religion, and became the patron of idolatry! And how naturally is it added, *the Lord was angry with Solomon!*[f] — To relate one example more, the zealous and forward

[f] 1 Kings xi. 4, 5. 7. 9.

Peter, who upon all occaſions was ſo eager, in teſtifying his regard for his Lord — who took upon him to rebuke his Maſter, for predicting his future ſufferings — who profeſſed himſelf ready to go with Chriſt, to priſon and to death — who declared, "*Though all men ſhall be offended becauſe* "*of thee, I will never be offended: Though* "*I ſhould die with thee, yet will I not* "*deny thee*" —— who actually drew his ſword, and fought in his Lord's defence — this Peter — fell — fell into the very ſnare, he was ſo confident of eſcaping. He was warned, that Satan deſired to have him, that he might ſift him as wheat — he was warned, that before the cock crowed, he ſhould deny his Lord — he gave no credit to the danger, and forgot the caution — through his affection for Jeſus, he ventured into improper company — he was charged with being an accomplice, and ſtraightway denied it — the charge was inſiſted on, and the denial repeated — till, to confirm it, upon the third accuſation, he was driven to blaſphemy; and *immediately the cock crew*, and, Jeſus looking with pity upon Peter, he

he remembered the words of the Lord, *and went out, and wept bitterly.*[g] —— What further proof do we need? — Let experience, let obſervation ſay, if our ſtanding is not as critical. The returning backſlider will tell you, that his heart was once ſeemingly impreſſed, with divine and ſpiritual concerns — that, touched with the guilt of ſin, he ſought Chriſt for mercy, and found it in him — that, from love to Jeſus, he profeſſed his name, walked in his ordinances, and was joined to them that fear the Lord — that the warmth of his mind ſet him, upon zealouſly diſtinguiſhing himſelf, in the cauſe of religion. — But alas! He will go on, "Small "was my knowledge of my own heart. "I did not diſcern the pride which lurk- "ed there. I was ready to look upon "more eſtabliſhed chriſtians, with an eye "of contempt — to ſuſpect their ſince- "rity — their quiet and uniform walk to "pronounce formality — to make com- "pariſons, greatly to the advantage of "myſelf — and to believe, there was no "doubt of my ſtanding unmoved. I miſ-

[g] Mat. xxvi. 33, 35, 74, 75.

" took the nature of the ſaint's perſe-
" verance — the hour of trial came — I
" loſt my guard — I tampered — and fell."
—— Or (to put the confeſſion into another dreſs, equally warranted by fact) he will ſay, " By degrees, the flame within me
" grew weak and languid — I became
" nice, critical, and captious in hearing
" — plain, ſearching, goſpel preaching, I
" diſliked — I wiſhed for refinement, more
" than ſerious inſtruction, for amuſement,
" more than practice, tho' I was aſhamed
" to avow it — the world flattered, and
" vain company ſeduced — the Lord's day
" was trifled with — the houſe of prayer,
" and the worſhip of the cloſet, were firſt
" often neglected, then totally forſaken —
" to conſcience I made a thouſand excu-
" ſes, of buſineſs and expediency, for the
" omiſſion of duty, and a compliance with
" cuſtom — till I waxed light, vain, har-
" dened, and immoral — laughed at the
" remonſtrances of the ſerious — was the
" companion, the ſport, of fools and wit-
" lings — diſhonoured God — and am now
" filled with my own ways. — Ah! Little
" did I think, when I profeſſed the name

" of

" of Jeſus, that I ſhould ever have ſunk " thus low! — My goodneſs hath been as a " morning cloud, and as the early dew it " hath gone away." —— The wretch who falls a facrifice to the laws of his country, will ſmite upon his breaſt, and heave the deep-fetched ſigh, " I hoped for a " better end than this — I had a fair " proſpect, of coming to my grave in " peace — but I was allured by ſin — I " refuſed my parents advice — I broke " the Lord's day — I was drawn into " wicked company, and from thence to " wicked courſes — my expences were great " — I was too idle to work, and to beg " I was aſhamed — I made free with my " neighbour's property, and the law has " condemned me, to publick diſgrace and " death."—— Let the worn-out, emaciated rake rehearſe his adventures, and you will learn how ſlippery the deſcent of vice; — how little able that man is to turn back, who has laid the reins upon the neck of his luſts. The waſte of fortune, the decay of health are, for the moſt part, too feeble reſtraints from farther exceſſes, till the ſcene of voluptuouſneſs terminates, in

inſolvency — beggary — or death. —— Once more: Hear the ſinner panting on the confines of eternity, the vital flame juſt expiring, and, if he is not too obdurate or incapable, he will thus bewail himſelf, "I put off the remembrance of my "Creator, in the days of my youth — I "gave myſelf up, to the gratification of "my appetites — and yet I promiſed "fairly, to amend my courſe of life — "after a few years I purpoſed to change "— I had even fixed the time for my "reformation — but when the moment "came, I was only more intoxicated by "ſin, and more unwilling to part with it "— I reſolved again, and again poſtponed "the reſolution — at laſt I deſiſted from "reſolving at all — became unfeeling — "and am now unchanged—haſtening to the "bar of Almighty God, with my offen-"ces unpardoned, and my ſoul unre-"newed." —— What terrible examples theſe! Are they the creatures of imagination? Would to God they exiſted no where elſe! — But being pictures of real life, let us not treat them as fables, but ſeriouſly aſk,

II. What

II. What inſtructions we may gather from them? —— *Let him that thinketh he ſtandeth, take heed leſt he fall,*[h] is their concurrent language. Had our predeceſſors, on the ſtage of life, depraved hearts within them? So have we. — Were they ſurrounded by ſpiritual enemies? We are equally ſo. —— Did ſin obtain advantage againſt them, to wound ſome, to ruin others? We are not in leſs danger. To be inſenſible, therefore, of this danger, is to be the more expoſed, becauſe leaſt aware of it. Sin can aſſume a thouſand forms, to deceive the ſimple, and Satan has a thouſand artifices, to impoſe upon his credulous votaries — to excuſe or palliate vice — to diſguiſe its horrid viſage — to gild the poiſonous pill, that the unthinking may ſwallow it down — to invite the unguarded mind, within the ſphere of attraction, that the magnetic power of ſin may faſten upon it. He is never indolent, though we may forget our watch; he goeth about as a hungry lion, ſeeking whom he may devour. To fancy ourſelves ſecure, then, what is it but to ſleep, whilſt our

[h] 1 Cor. x. 12.

our adverſary is advancing upon us — to make no reſiſtance, but ſuffer him to fetter, and lead us captive at his will? Are we not called to the exerciſe, of the oppoſite duties? To the young, the inexperienced, the confident, this advice eſpecially addreſſes itſelf; exhorting,

1. To watchfulneſs. —— Say not of this or that particular crime, "I hope I "ſhall never be guilty of it." —— Moſt heartily do I wiſh ſo too. — But it is incumbent on us to fear the worſt, and, therefore, to guard againſt the remoteſt approaches to it. There is nothing ſo ſmall in ſin, as to juſtify indifference, or to be too earneſt in avoiding. The caution of Solomon concerning ſtrife, may be ſtrictly applied to every ſpecies of tranſgreſſion, *The beginning of* it is, as *when one letteth out water; therefore leave* it *off before it be meddled with.*[1] — Behold how great a matter, a little fire kindleth! Be ſober, then, be vigilant; watch againſt every ſin, againſt the occaſions leading thereunto, againſt the riſings of inward corruption, againſt the inſinuations of evil company, againſt

[1] Prov. xvii. 14.

againſt the enſnaring influence of worldly purſuits, againſt the appearance of evil; ſo keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it are the iſſues of life. —— With this join,

2. Prayer, fervent prayer, that you may not be led into temptation, but delivered from its evil; for unleſs the Lord defend us, our watchfulneſs will only make us, the more ſenſible ſpectators of our fall. To ſtir up the ſoul, to a concern for its perſonal ſafety, the Lord ſets home thoſe reflections, which excite to watchfulneſs. — To engage to prayer, he makes watchfulneſs conducive, to that important ſelf-acquaintance, which teaches a total reliance upon himſelf. — And by both demonſtrates, that our ſalvation is of himſelf, entirely of his grace. So that they, who are *kept by the power of God unto ſalvation*, are yet kept *through faith*,[k] which faith, as it proceeds from the God of all grace, implies prayer, that fetches all its ſupplies from God.[l] —— But why do I ſpeak

[k] 1 Pet. i. 5.

[l] The reader may ſee theſe heads profeſſedly illuſtrated,

I ſpeak merely of prayer, againſt the out-breakings of the diſorders of the heart, and a compliance with the ſuggeſtions of temptation? Undoubtedly, the moſt ſanctified chriſtian has daily, hourly occaſion for it. But is not ſomething farther neceſſary — that we be not only anxious for our defence, but have ſtrength to attack ſin in our turn — that the old man be crucified, by the croſs of Chriſt, and our ſouls be rendered more devout, vigorous, heavenly-minded? When the Apoſtle exhorted the Romans, *not to be conformed unto this world*, he added another duty in ſubſervience thereunto, *but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.* [m] Is not ſuch progreſſive renovation poſſible in you, Chriſtians? And is it not eſſential, to our dying to the objects of time, and mortifying our affections which are upon the earth? Ought we not then to be conſcientiouſly diligent, in the means of religion, with a principal view to this effect, that we may have a more

trated, in a ſermon printed by the Author, and ſold by the publiſhers of theſe volumes, entitled, *The Chriſtian's Strength*, p. 15——20.

[m] Rom. xii. 2.

more lively perception of the love of Jeſus, in our ſouls — that we may grow more in his grace — that the features of his image may be more viſible upon us — and that we may obtain a greater victory through faith? —— The ſame advice is, with ſome variation, applicable to thoſe, who never yet entered upon the good ways of God. While I have been inſiſting, that the way of tranſgreſſors is hard, and their end deſtruction — while you are called upon, to take the book of God into your hands, and liſten to what eternal truth ſpeaks of your ſtate — while you are entreated, to watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation, O! reſt not there — but be perſuaded, at the ſame time, to make it the main part of your petitions at the mercy-ſeat, that you may perceive the malignity of ſin, univerſally; that you may be bleſſed with that repentance, which is not to be repented of; that, believing on the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, a clean heart may be created, and a right ſpirit renewed within you; that you may love God, and live to him! Happy ye, if partakers of theſe ſpiritual gifts!

Happy

Happy in life — infinitely more happy, in the God of all conſolation, than ſin, with all its flattery, can make you — happy, when death ſhuts your eyes, upon all that is deſirable here below, and opens them, upon the glorious and tremendous realities, of the inviſible world — happy, in the full fruition of God for ever. May God grant you ſtrength, to ſeek, to lay hold on this mercy! Amen! Amen!

HYMN.

I.

SIN has a thouſand treach'rous arts
To practiſe on the mind;
With flatt'ring looks ſhe tempts our hearts,
But leaves a ſting behind.

II.

She pleads for all the joys ſhe brings,
And gives a fair pretence;
But cheats the ſoul of heav'nly things,
And chains it down to ſenſe.

DISCOURSE XXI.

Iſaiah's viſion.

ISAIAH vi. 1—8.

In the year that king Uzziah died, I ſaw alſo the Lord, ſitting upon a throne high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it ſtood the ſeraphims: each one had ſix wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and ſaid, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hoſts: "the whole earth is full of his glory." And the poſts of the door moved, at the voice of him that cried, and the houſe was filled with ſmoke. Then ſaid I, "Wo is me! for I am undone; becauſe "I am a man of unclean lips, and I "dwell in the midſt of a people of un-"clean lips; for mine eyes have ſeen "the

" *the King, the Lord of hoſts.*" *Then flew one of the ſeraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand,* which *he had taken with the tongs from off the altar. And he laid* it *upon my mouth, and ſaid,* " *Lo, this hath touched thy* " *lips; and thine iniquity is taken away,* " *and thy ſin purged.*" *Alſo I heard the voice of the Lord, ſaying,* " *Whom* " *ſhall I ſend, and who will go for us?*" *Then ſaid I,* " *Here* am *I; ſend me.*"

WHILST religion, in its ſpirit and power, is ſo little underſtood, it is not wonderful, that, through the prevailing diſlike, it is the common ſubject of deriſion, from a defect of better argument againſt it, or that ſo much ridicule is made, of what ſerious people term, communicating their *experience* of divine things. It is readily admitted, that a vaſt deal of what, now-a-days, goes by the name of chriſtian-experience, is very deluſive, conſiſting of whims, flights, and raptures, engendered by the warmth of animal paſſions, without one ſpark of grace. Accordingly, we have often

often ſeen theſe vain-glorious paraders, like the crackling of thorns under a pot, bluſter for a time, and then vaniſh into emptineſs. But it does not follow, becauſe much of this talk is from falſe principles, that therefore none of it is from true. On the contrary, when Paul reaſoned with the Jews, with Feſtus, and Agrippa, concerning his profeſſion of chriſtianity, he thought the beſt, and moſt effectual method, of arguing with them, would be to tell them his experience; that is, in what manner he was converted, and made a miniſter of the goſpel. He appealed to the well-known fact, of his being ſtruck down, as he journeyed to Damaſcus; he particularized the converſation Jeſus had with him, and his ſenſations, reſulting from the diſcoveries made to him; and he left them to make their own reflections.[n] In like manner, defending himſelf againſt the Galatians, who were inveigled to queſtion the validity of his call to the miniſtry, he gave them, in ſubſtance, the ſame account, as a proof, that though he had not ſeen Chriſt

[n] Acts xxii. 25.

Chriſt in the fleſh, or been formally authorized by the Apoſtles, yet he was really commiſſioned by the head of the church, to declare the glorious goſpel of the grace of God. — That this, alſo, was a very ancient practice, we learn from our text, in which the prophet Iſaiah relates his firſt entrance upon religion, and the procedure of his appointment, to be a prophet of the Lord. —— The former chapters containing ſome very cutting rebukes, of the conduct of the king and people, in the reign of Jotham, and eſpecially Ahaz, kings of Judah, we may naturally ſuppoſe the people (who notwithſtanding the judgment of God upon Uzziah, *did yet corruptly*,[o] and therefore diſreliſhed Iſaiah's reproofs) would ſtart an objection, "Who gave him power to "ſpeak, and aſſume the authority of a "prophet?" as, from the ſame motive, the deſcendants of theſe Jews demanded of our Lord, "*By what authority doeſt* "*thou theſe things; and who gave thee* "*this authority?*"[p] — The prophetic character of Iſaiah, too, was the more remarkable,

[o] 2 Chron. xxvii. 2. [p] Mat. xxi. 23.

markable, if the tradition be well-founded, that he was of the royal family of Judah, and his father the brother of king Uzziah. His ſtile, indeed, poſſeſſes a degree of elegance, ſuperior to moſt of the prophets. Perhaps he had been a man of the world, and a man of pleaſure, until God, who viewed him as a choſen veſſel, and had work for him to do, met with, and made him a godly man and a miniſter; to account for which change, and reply to the people's curioſity, he ſeems to give the narration in our text.——In the year that king Uzziah died, he tells us, he was in the temple, attending the outward forms of worſhip, and there he had a viſion, which convinced him, there was more in religion and religious worſhip, than he was before aware of. He ſaw *the Lord*, that is, ſome viſible appearance of the divine Being, *as it were ſitting upon a throne*, *high*, exalted, and ſurrounded by ſo great a company of angels, that *his train filled the temple*. If it be enquired, Who is particularly meant here, by *the Lord?* The Lord Jeſus is termed, the *image of the inviſible*

ble God,[q] by whom the inviſible God made himſelf known; and the Evangeliſt John, quoting the paſſage of which our text is a part, adds, *Theſe things ſaid Eſaias, when he ſaw his glory, and ſpake of him.*[r] — *Saw* whoſe *glory?* — *Spake of* whom? —— The glory of Chriſt undoubtedly, of whom the Evangeliſt had juſt been treating. It was God, in the perſon of his Son, then, who appeared to Iſaiah; and theſe texts compared, afford an explicit teſtimony, to the Son of God, as Jehovah, the Eternal. — Amongſt the angelic attendants, *Seraphims* are diſtinctly noticed. The word ſignifies *to burn*, and the Pſalmiſt explains it, *He maketh his angels ſpirits, his miniſters a flame of fire*;[s] intimating the readineſs, and even ardour, of their obedience, to the orders of their king; in token of which, and further to deſcribe their reverence and humility, they are here repreſented, therefore, as having *ſix wings*; with two they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they fled. —— Addreſſing, alſo, the Lord on

[q] Col. i. 15. [r] John xii. 41. [s] Pſalm civ. 4.

on the throne, they were not afraid, leſt they ſhould pay him too great reſpect; in direct terms they confeſs him to be, the *Lord of* the armies of heaven, to whom the higheſt aſcriptions are due. "*Holy, Holy, Holy,* is *the Lord of hoſts,* "they ſay, *the whole earth* is *full of his* "*glory.*" — So tremendous was the ſound, that the door-poſts of the temple trembled (perhaps to ſignify, that the temple and its worſhip ſhould be ſhaken and removed by the goſpel, the kingdom which endureth for ever) and the whole houſe was filled *with* a thick *ſmoke,* that is, with the cloud, which over-ſhadowed his throne, who is emphatically ſaid, to make *darkneſs his pavilion.*[t] —— Aſtoniſhed at this awful appearance, Iſaiah exclaimed, "Mi-"ſerable man! *Wo is me! for I am un-*"*done*; *becauſe I* am *a man of unclean* "*lips, and dwell in the midſt of a people of* "*unclean lips.*" He found that difference, between the way in which he had worſhipped God, and the praiſes of the holy angels before his eyes, that he durſt not lift up his head, till a ſeraph, having

[t] 2 Chron. vi. 1.

taken one of the coals which conſumed the daily ſacrifice, flew with it as it burnt, and laid it upon his mouth, ſaying, "*Lo* "*this hath touched thy lips, and thine ini-* "*quity is taken away, and thy ſin is purged.*" What compoſure Iſaiah felt in his mind, and with what greater courage he could ſpeak to others of their ſins, when his own were taken away, may be collected from the remainder of the narration, but is beſt underſtood, by thoſe who have experienced any meaſure, of what he did. A voice was heard, as it were the voice of God, ſaying, "*Whom ſhall* I *ſend, and* "*who will go for US?*" Theſe two ſentences are remarkable. The firſt expreſſes the *unity* of God Moſt High — the ſecond, that inexplicable *plurality*, he has manifeſted to be in the Godhead. Immediately Iſaiah anſwered, "*Here* am *I*; "*ſend me*; let me know in what way I "can be ſerviceable; my whole life will "be ſhort enough to teſtify my gratitude, "for the favour I am made partaker "of."— From that moment he commenced a prophet of the Lord. He ſteadfaſtly perſiſted in his employment, notwithſtanding

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ing the obloquy and perſecution it expoſed him unto; and, it is affirmed, was at laſt *ſawn aſunder*, by order of Manaſſeh, during the idolatrous part of that prince's reign.

Though it is but ſeldom God is pleaſed, to take ſuch extraordinary methods of converting ſinners, as in the examples of Iſaiah and Paul, yet to teach us, that his extraordinary operations are not confined, to the ages of miracles and prophecy, when I mention the converſion of *Colonel Gardiner*,[u] you will recollect, that its manner

[u] To beguile the tedious hour, between his departure from company, and an aſſignation at midnight, with a married woman, he took up a book, deſignedly placed in his way, called the *Chriſtian Soldier*. "While he was reading, he thought he ſaw an unuſual blaze of light fall on the book, which he at firſt imagined might happen, by ſome accident in the candle. But, lifting up his eyes, he apprehended, to his extreme amazement, that there was before him, as it were ſuſpended in the air, a viſible repreſentation of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt upon the croſs, ſurrounded on all ſides with a glory; and was impreſſed, as if a voice, or ſomething equivalent to a voice, had come to him, to this effect (for he was not confident as to the very words) "*Oh ſinner, did I ſuffer this for thee, and are theſe*

"*the*

was ſomewhat ſimilar. —— And there is another thing worthy of notice, that whether the outward means are more or leſs remarkable, the converſion of each of God's people is in itſelf equally wonderful; and whether Iſaiah was called by means of a viſion he ſaw, or chriſtians are wrought on, through the more ordinary agency of the word of God, let the cauſe be perceivable in a greater or leſs degree, yet as the effect has always been the ſame, proceeding from the ſame inward principles, through the influences of the ſame Holy Spirit, it will juſtify me in explaining Iſaiah's viſion, as containing in it, the main and eſſential parts of the experience of the godly in general, in their converſion from ſin to God. — For

"*the returns?*" Struck with ſo amazing a Phænomenon as this, there remained hardly any life in him, ſo that he ſunk down in the arm-chair in which he ſat, and continued, he knew not exactly how long, inſenſible." But the effects of the impreſſion were, a rooted averſion to ſin, and a love to Chriſt and holineſs, which diſtinguiſhed his whole behaviour afterwards, till his much lamented, but glorious exit, at the battle of *Preſton Pans*.

Doddridge's Life of Col. Gardiner, p. 27.

For this purpoſe four particulars preſent themſelves :

I. The view Iſaiah had of God ;

II. The conſequence of that view ;

III. The comfort he obtained ; and

IV. The effects of that comfort.

I. In the view Iſaiah had of God, is there not a ſtriking reſemblance, of that which paſſed through your minds, Chriſtians, when you were firſt awakened ? Who gave you ſuch different ideas, from what you ever had previous to this moment ? God ſaid, " Let there be light," and there was light ; he commanded the day-ſtar of his grace, to ſhine into your hearts, your former darkneſs was diſſipated, and, with the eyes of faith, you ſaw *the King, the Lord of hoſts.* — When God leads a ſoul into the ſaving knowledge of himſelf, he unveils the underſtanding, in a ſpiritual and peculiar way. Without this, Iſaiah's viſion would at moſt have frightened, not changed him. Mere terror and aſtoniſhment may be excited in an heart, which, after all, remains under the do-

minion of ſin. Iſrael beheld the glory of God at Sinai — they were filled with dread — to Moſes they ſaid, "*Speak thou* "*with us, and we will hear; but let not* "*God ſpeak with us, leſt we die.*"[w] Yet, ſpeedily after the thunder had ceaſed, they made a golden calf, and worſhipped the work of their own hands. Much more ſerious and affecting is a ſpiritual acquaintance with God. Two attributes, particularly, ſtruck Iſaiah; God's *majeſty*, and *holineſs*. The former of theſe is repreſented, by his being ſeated on a throne — a throne lifted up — higher than the higheſt ranks of his creatures — the angelic hoſts ſtanding, as ſervants, beſide his throne, in a waiting poſture, ready to receive his orders. — The armies of heaven unanimouſly pay him homage. — The extent, the number, the magnitude, and grandeur of his works proclaim him, the high, the mighty, the all-wiſe God, whoſe glory fills the whole earth. — The ſcripture abounds in the moſt auguſt diſplays of him, as the *high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity*[x] — *who hath meaſured the waters*

[w] Exodus xx. 19. [x] Iſaiah lvii. 15.

waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with a ſpan, and comprehended the duſt of the earth in a meaſure, and weighed the mountains in ſcales, and the hills in a balance — who ſitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are *as graſhoppers* [y] — whoſe *kingdom ruleth over all* [z] — *who changeth the times and ſeaſons* [a] — who maketh the counſels of men ſubſervient to his own will, the *wrath of man to praiſe him*, [b] and *the ſtormy winds* to *fulfil his word* [c] — whom none can withſtand, or ſay unto, "What doeſt "thou?" — whoſe *kingdom is an everlaſting kingdom*, and whoſe *dominion endureth throughout all generations.* [d] From whence we infer, that the general neglect of God in this world, ariſes from ignorance of him — that he who *ſaith in his heart, There is no God*, or forgets there is one, to whom he muſt account for his actions, is, in the trueſt ſenſe, *a fool* [e] — that when the mind is ſupernaturally enlightened to ſee God, it diſcerns nothing in him that

[y] Iſaiah xl. 12. 22. [z] Pſalm ciii. 19. [a] Dan. ii. 21.
[b] Pſalm lxxvi. 10. [c] Pſalm cxlviii. 8.
[d] Pſalm cxlv. 13. [e] Pſalm xiv. 1.

is new, though the diſcovery is new, but that majeſty which has dwelt in God eternally, and which it is a melancholy reflection, that, though ſo apparent, very few are apprehenſive of — and, laſtly, that the deſign of the converſion of a ſinner, being to reduce him finally, to the ſubjection of heaven, the man who does not lie under a deep and habitual impreſſion of God's awful majeſty, *hath neither ſeen God nor known him.*[f] — Again, the holineſs of the divine Being, was perceived by the prophet. The ſeraphims expatiate on the word, *Holy! Holy! Holy!* as well to denote, the co-equal holineſs of Father, Son, and Spirit, as the ſuperlative purity of God's nature. He is in the higheſt degree holy, the fountain and ſpring of all that is great and good, a God of order, whoſe unerring wiſdom and ſpotleſs rectitude always incline him, to that which is right, fit, and beſt. The very happineſs of God conſiſts in the holineſs, eſſential to him; and holineſs conſtituted, the primitive beauty and felicity, of his creation. With complacency he looked

[f] 1 John iii. 6.

looked upon all the works he had made; *and behold* they were *very good*;[g] in number, weight, and meaſure; there was no jarring or confuſion, but regularity, harmony, and glory; every thing was diſpoſed for the good of the whole, and, in a ſenſe, faſhioned in righteouſneſs and true holineſs, a faint image of the underived brightneſs, of him who created them. — Now, from a practical conviction, of the majeſty and holineſs of God, the reflections of the ſoul will draw two concluſions; the firſt, of its own meanneſs, the ſecond, of its own ſinfulneſs. The former, indeed, reſides in the boſom of the moſt perfect of created beings. From the ſame principle, that David addreſſed the Lord, *When I conſider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the ſtars which thou haſt ordained*; *What* is *man that thou art mindful of him? and the ſon of man that thou viſiteſt him?*[h] The angels, in our text, covered their faces with their wings, conſcious of their own nothingneſs in God's preſence. — The latter implies

[g] Gen. i. 31. [h] Pſalm viii. 3, 4.

a penitent ſenſe of guilt, and leads me to the

II. Remark in Iſaiah's viſion. — The ſplendour of God, deſcending into his mind, detected its impurity, and he cried out, in the utmoſt diſtreſs, "*Wo* is *me!* "*for I am undone*; *becauſe I* am *a man of* "*unclean lips, and I dwell in the midſt of* "*a people of unclean lips*;" a confeſſion, deſcriptive of the workings of genuine repentance, in every heart poſſeſſed thereof, and which propoſes to our conſideration, the ſentiments impreſſed on the prophet's mind, concerning the nature of ſin — concerning himſelf — and concerning the people he was nationally connected with.

1. Sin he calls uncleanneſs, and elſewhere compares to that which is moſt odious and loathſome, or which the ceremonial law of God accounted vile, abominable, deteſtable.[1] — Recollect the aforegoing reaſoning, and ſee if his opinion is exaggerated. Is God an infinite majeſty? Sin is an inſult to his greatneſs, and a flat refuſal of the homage of his creatures.

[1] Iſaiah xxx. 22. lxiv. 6.

tures. The dignity of the perſon, againſt whom an offence is committed, enhances the guilt of the offence. An affront to a fellow-creature riſes, according to the ſtation he holds, in the community to which he belongs. Contempt of a private individual bears no proportion, to a contempt of the ſupreme law-giver of a country. Yea, a ſmaller indignity in itſelf, yet offered to the governour of a nation, is eſtimated of a more heinous nature, than a crime of greater magnitude, againſt an ordinary perſon. The criminality of ſin then is unrivalled, as the glory of God is unequalled, and he of right demands, the exerciſe of all our powers in his ſervice. It is no inconſiſtency to aſſert, that the ſmalleſt breach of thoſe precepts of the law, which relate to God himſelf, exceeds the higheſt act of injuſtice, to men like ourſelves. Let the profane ſwearer, the irreverent worſhipper, the ſabbath-breaker know, that the thief and murderer, though peſts of ſociety, and through neceſſity expelled the company of mankind, yet are not (ſimply for acts of injury to their fellow-mortals)

ſo

ſo obnoxious in God's ſight, as the wretch who trifles with his holy name, or finds his own pleaſure on God's holy day. — Is God infinitely holy? That alſo points, to the turpitude and deformity of ſin. By knowing what is right, we are taught what is wrong; from the idea of ſtraightneſs, we attain to that of crookedneſs;[k] by the law is the knowledge of ſin, and by the commandment, ſin appears exceeding ſinful. If God himſelf is glorious in holineſs, then his law, the tranſcript of his perfections, is beautiful, and impropriety is of the eſſence of ſin. If the law of God is pure, then is ſin impure. If the law is order, then is ſin confuſion and diſorder. If the law conduces to happineſs, then ſin is miſery. Say, if fact does not demonſtrate its malignity? Whence otherwiſe that perplexity, that heterogeneous intermixture, ſo invariable in all earthly concerns? Holineſs diffuſes that felicity, which reigns unſullied in heaven; ſin renders hell, an abode of unalleviated torment; and ſin, by its prevalence in our world, has turned it into

[k] *Rectum index ſui et obliqui.*

into a waſte, an howling wilderneſs. —— The goodneſs of God exhibits wickedneſs, in a yet more flagrant and daring point of light; but from the majeſty and holineſs of the Lord, we learn its innate contrariety to his excellencies, its highly treaſonable complexion, were there no additional circumſtances of aggravation. — And as the powerful operations of God's Spirit, upon the awakened ſoul, never failed to produce, this thorough deteſtation of ſin in general, ſo from a retroſpection on his paſt conduct, and a compariſon thereof, with what God is and God requires, aroſe

2. *I*ſaiah's perſonal application of the matter, and knowledge of his own ſinfulneſs. —— Before divine illumination took place in the mind of Paul, he had no adequate diſcernment, of the ſtrict obligations of God's law, or the extent of its demands; conſequently, his deviations were ſlightly regarded, and ſpeedily forgot; ſin ſat eaſy upon his conſcience; his hopes were alive, and becauſe, touching the round of ceremonial, and the outward obſervance of certain moral duties, he was blameleſs, he

he concluded all was as it ſhould be, and looked no further. *But when the commandment came* home to him, in its native force and vigour, his mind could be no longer impoſed on; *ſin revived*, guilt ſtared him in the face, and his former good opinion of himſelf *died.*[l] — Exactly ſimilar, were the ſenſations of Iſaiah, upon the memorable occaſion we are diſcourſing of. "*Wo* is *me*, ſays he, "*for I am undone, becauſe I* am *a man of* "*unclean lips.*" Two things immediately ſtruck him, — his defilement, and his ruin. —— "*I* am *a man of unclean lips:* What "elſe renders me incapable, of mixing "my praiſes, with the pure ſpirits be- "fore me? I ſee now, as Jacob did at "Bethel, that *ſurely the Lord is in this* "*place, and I knew* it not.[m] I ſee, that "I have hitherto never truly worſhipped "God. What are my empty, heartleſs, "formal adorations, to the ſeraphic aſcrip- "tions of theſe angelic hoſts? Alas! Sin "has infected my lips, that, like the "plague of leproſy, they contaminate "every thing which paſſes through them." — Nor

[l] Rom. vii. 9. [m] Gen. xxviii. 16.

— Nor is it unreaſonable to ſuppoſe, that, in this lamentation, he put his lips for the whole man; perſuaded, that their uncleanneſs proceeded from the pollution of his heart, and that he, who was by ſin unfitted, for glorifying God with his lips, was thereby incapacitated, in a much greater degree, for acceptably ſerving God with his hands; becauſe out of the corruption of the heart, ariſe thoſe evil thoughts, thoſe irregular deſires, thoſe ſelfiſh and intereſted aims, thoſe numerous and horrid exhalations, which defile the man; and the outward practice will certainly be directed, by the principles of action predominant within. —— Thus arguing, do you wonder that Iſaiah looked upon his caſe as deſperate? "*I* am *undone*, he ſeems to "ſay, becauſe unmeet for the ſociety of "immaculate purity — *undone*, becauſe, "by being holy, God muſt be juſt, and "inflict vengeance for my ſins — *undone*, "becauſe I can neither reſiſt, nor flee "from him — *undone*, and obliged to bear "teſtimony againſt myſelf, for the ini-"quities of all my former years — *Wo* is "*me!* What will become of me! Where "ſhall

" ſhall I hide myſelf, from the ſolemn " inſpection, the ſtrict, the righteous ſcru- " tiny, of the Judge of all the earth ?" —— But,

3. Tho' true repentance conſiſts chiefly, in a ſorrowful review of our own depravity and tranſgreſſions, tis not a principle abſorbed in ſelf. If the penitent ſoul does not obſerve the ſins of others, with the jaundiced eye of cenſoriouſneſs, yet, having had the beam taken out of his own eye, he ſees more clearly, and, with the tears flowing from the operation upon himſelf, would, if poſſible, waſh away the mote, that is in his brother's eye. While, therefore, he aggravates his own ſins, *he ſighs and cries for all the abominations*, he is *in the midſt*[n] of; " *I dwell in the midſt* " *of a people of unclean lips*," added Iſaiah. —— " Myſelf a ſinner, I am but one " out of many thouſands. Though the " chief of them, I am ſurrounded by " multitudes, who are running their lengths " alſo. Wherever I turn my eye, I be- " hold ſinners — ſinners delighting in ſin " — ſinners committing all uncleanneſs " with

[n] Ezekiel ix. 4.

" with greedineſs — ſinners inſenſible of " the judgments due to their crimes. We " are a nation of ſinners, from the meaneſt " to the greateſt; *the whole head is ſick,* " *and the whole heart faint*; *from the ſole* " *of the foot, even unto the head there is* " *no ſoundneſs*[•] in us. How univerſal the " degeneracy! How dire the calamities, " which may be expected to enſue! Ah! " I am terrified at the conſequences. Will " not God be avenged, on ſuch a nation " as this?" —— Thus, at the time that the many are careleſs and vain, exult in their impieties, and draw down the wrath of incenſed Omnipotence, the godly foreſee, and on their knees, endeavour to deprecate that wrath. Does not the bare deſcription of the prophet's feelings evince their neceſſity, to the exiſtence of religion in any ſoul, and to the proſperity of any community? Can there be a ſerious application for mercy, from an inſenſible, unawakened heart; or any national-reformation, without perſonal-repentance? Excluſive of this then, what are the moſt pompous diſplays of faſtings and prayers, the

[•] Iſaiah i. 5, 6.

the moſt ſanctimonious exactneſs, in rites of man's invention, or the ſtricteſt adherence, to the external part of divine inſtitutions, but a laboured mockery of God, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, or look with approbation, on the effuſions of a mind not cleanſed from its filthineſs?

PART. II.

ON the other hand, the text leads us,

III. To the ample encouragement and direction, afforded ſelf-abaſed ſinners; and expreſſed, by the comfort Iſaiah obtained, under the painful remembrance of his ſins; one of the ſeraphs, having taken a *live*, a burning *coal*, *from off the altar*, *laid it*, in appearance, *upon his mouth*, *and ſaid*, "*Lo*, *this hath touched thy lips*, *and* "*thine iniquity is taken away*, *and thy ſin* "*is purged.*" — Here obſerve,

1. That

1. That by *taking away iniquity*, *purging ſin*, and the like phraſes, it is not meant, that ſin may be thought lightly of, or diſregarded. The ſame terms are made uſe of in ſcripture, to denote deliverance from the love of ſin,[p] and that deliverance always involves in it, the regarding ſin with ſhame and deteſtation. Indeed, when ſin is, in the ſenſe of the text, in the cleareſt manner taken away, the ſubject of this mercy has it notwithſtanding, before his eyes and upon his heart, as the principal matter of his ſorrow and concern. The import, then, of the expreſſions is, that ſin is forgiven, and ſo taken away and purged, that it ſhall not be exhibited as his indictment, in the court of heaven, ſhall not be mentioned to his diſadvantage, and final condemnation, who is thus bleſſed; agreeably to which, runs a farther explanation in this prophet, "*I* even *I* am *he that blotteth* "*out thy tranſgreſſions, for mine own ſake,* "*and will not remember thy ſins,*[q] ſo as "to execute the fierceneſs of my wrath "upon thee, or prevent the beſtowment, "of

[p] Iſaiah xxvii. 9. [q] Iſaiah xliii. 25.

" of grace and glory." — The extent of the expreſſions reaches, moreover, to the ſatisfaction of this mercy in the conſcience, as intimated to Iſaiah, by the word " *Lo.* " Behold it — look upon it — make it " the ground of thy dependance — de- " rive conſolation from it — rejoice in it, " as the firm baſis of thy hope, that, " terrifying as were thine apprehenſions " lately, yet now, *thine iniquity is taken* " *away, and thy ſin is purged* — ſteadfaſtly " fix thine eyes upon this truth, and the " means whereby it is effected." —— You aſk, therefore,

2. By what means? — The text anſwers, By the touch of a live coal, taken from off the altar. The Jewiſh ſacrifices were typical of the chriſtian propitiation, and prefigured the ſufferings of our bleſſed Redeemer, as the altar ſeems to have ſet forth the value, ſtamped on thoſe ſufferings, by the union of his divine nature. For if, as our Lord inſtructs us, the altar *ſanctified*, (that is, ſet apart, and put efficacy into) *the gift upon it*, [r] for the purpoſes of the legal œconomy, how much

[r] Mat. xxiii. 19.

much more effectual the death of Chriſt, *who, through the eternal Spirit,*[s] *offered himſelf without ſpot unto God!* By the live coal then Iſaiah was taught, to expect a more excellent ſacrifice, than that on the altar, which would purge his conſcience from dead works, through whom alone his ſins, or the ſins of his nation, could be forgiven, and the wrath of God averted. — He was taught alſo, that the ſacrifice of Jeſus is ſo replete with virtue, virtue ever freſh and unimpaired, that however a faith increaſed, by a larger experience of the ways of God, may confirm the ſoul more in holineſs and comfort, the very firſt touch, the very firſt application of the merits of Chriſt to the ſoul, the very firſt act of faith in him,

[s] "The nature of our author's argument ſeems "to lead us to conſider this *Spirit*, as ſignifying "the λογος or divine nature of our Lord, ſince "he is ſetting forth the intrinſic worth and ex-"cellency of his offering," is the juſt conceſſion, into which the *ſurprize* of truth ſeems to have drawn, unawares to himſelf, a learned oppoſer of the Deity of the Son of God, the late Mr. *Peirce* of *Exeter*, in his *Annotations* on Heb. ix. 14. confeſſing alſo, the propriety of the interpretation, *Eternal Spirit*, which he inſerts, accordingly, in his Paraphraſe.

him, lays hold of everlaſting ſalvation, and tranſmits the believer from death to life. "*If I may but touch his garment,* "*I ſhall be whole,*" [t] ſaid one diſtreſſed object, who followed Jeſus, and her ſucceſs was proportionable to her wiſhes. "*Lo, this hath touched thy lips,* proclaim- "ed the ſeraph to the prophet, *and thine* "*iniquity is taken away, and thy ſin is* "*purged.*" — Trace the evangelic ſtrain, in which Iſaiah ſpoke of the Saviour — related his tragical death, more like an hiſtory than a prophecy — painted his ſorrows, as if, with his eyes, he then beheld the Lamb of God, wounded for our ſins, bruiſed for our iniquities, and the chaſtiſement of our peace laid upon him, and can you entertain a doubt, that he had thoſe diſcoveries made to him, of the glorious goſpel, we have here repreſented? — But we muſt not quit this part of the ſubject, without obſerving from it,

3. That, enlivening as are the truths of the goſpel, no ſoul is able to appropriate, the benefit or comfort of thoſe truths

[t] Mat. ix. 21.

truths, till God gives the power. — The ſacrifice was burning upon the altar — Iſaiah was ſtruck with the glory of God, and his own vileneſs — but could, of himſelf, recollect nothing for his comfort — could derive no conſolation, or hope of pardon, from the ſacrifice, though in full view. He might have picked up ſome common notions, of its being an atonement for ſin — he might, perhaps, with others, have confided in his cuſtomary attendance on it, as a ſufficient recompence for his tranſgreſſions. But one ſpiritual glance at the divine ſplendour, confuted his idle prejudices, opened up the deluſion of his former proſpects, his ſoul ſhrunk up with terrour, till the Seraph touched his lips, and pronounced his ſins forgiven. —— Faith is the gift of God. *No man can come to Chriſt, except the Father draw him.*[u] That very principle of unbelief, which inſpirits the unawakened and inſenſible, with preſumptuous and ill-founded expectations, of peace in the road of vanity and ſin, and thus prevents their ſerious humble ſuit, at the throne of mercy,

[u] John vi. 44.

with the ſame intention, throws obſtacles innumerable in the way of the awakened, to work in them diſcouraging thoughts of that mercy. It is the province of God's grace, therefore, to diſpel the gloom of the mind, to make known the ſuitableneſs of the Saviour, and the kindneſs of his heart, to encourage to a believing confidence in him. And ſhall I attempt, Chriſtians, to call to your remembrance, the experience of former years, whereby this remark became the ſettled opinion of your hearts? Brought to ſerious conſideration, and your eyes turned in upon yourſelves, you readily perceived your own ſinfulneſs, but not the fulneſs of the redemption by Chriſt. — You had no confidence in the fleſh, neither could you rejoice in Jeſus, the ſacrifice upon the altar: — You tried to reaſon your ſouls into a belief, that your caſe was not ſo deſperate, as from firſt impreſſions you dreaded; — but in vain — a review of your paſt life ſerved to heighten your guilt; and vows of future obedience had been ſo often violated, that you could truſt them no longer; beſides that this obedience, if performed, would have

have involved in itſelf, the grounds of its condemnation: —You communed with your own heart, and your ſpirit made diligent ſearch, for ſome inward marks, from whence to obtain ſatisfaction, that God had given you his grace; but your ſoul was dark and confuſed, and the efforts of reaſon were too feeble, to repel the oppoſite force of doubts and miſgivings: — Nor leſs unavailingly, did you ſtrive to faſten upon ſome gracious declaration of God's word, to ſupport your tottering hopes; you could diſcern nothing, whereupon to found your claim, of an intereſt in God's promiſes: — Convinced, by this variety of expedients, that peace of conſcience is not within the reach of human exertions, you ſunk down as helpleſs and loſt; "Wo "is me, you ſaid, for I am undone!" "Lord, ſave, or I periſh." On one ſide, and on another you looked, but ſaw no deliverer, and, tho' you durſt not neglect the means of grace, your attendance on them was in that heartleſs and diſpirited frame, that, inſtead of yielding relief to your diſtracted thoughts, 'tis not impoſſible but they encreaſed them; —— till

God opened your lips, that your mouth might ſhew forth his praiſe — till the Spirit of the Lord flew to your ſuccour — took of the things of God and ſhewed them unto you — anointed your eyes with eye ſalve, that you might ſee the glory and freedom of goſpel grace — applied to your caſe, ſome precious text, and, from its contents, enabled you to perceive, that there is mercy with God, yea plenteous redemption — enabled you to depend reſignedly on that mercy; and ſo, as it were, with a live-coal from God's altar, touched your lips, and ſpoke peaceably to you, "Be of good courage, your "ſins are forgiven you." —— Remember the years of the right-hand of the Moſt High — remember the conſolations diffuſed through your heart, the change wrought in your mind, when joy was given you for mourning, and the garment of praiſe for the ſpirit of heavineſs — remember, how ſweet were your meditations of God, when the houſe was made to you, none other than the gate of heaven — remember the times of refreſhing from the preſence of the Lord, that the

the remembrance may revive your languid affections (which now too often cleave unto the duſt) and, while it enlivens your proſpects and gladdens your hearts, may be a means of provoking you, to love and to good works. —— Such was the effect mercy had upon Iſaiah, as we learn from the text,

IV. To put the ſincerity of his experience to proof, the Lord demanded, "*Whom ſhall I ſend, and who will go* "*for us?*" Straightway Iſaiah replied, "*Here* am *I, ſend me*;" at once pointing out to us, the will of God, and the deſire of his people, to be active in his ſervice.—Reflect on the deſign, which God cannot but propoſe in all his works, the diſplay of his own glory, and then ſay, whether he has it not in view, in his nobleſt work on the heart of man—converſion? If Iſaiah was called to be a prophet —— if Paul was appointed an apoſtle, and both qualified, with abilities peculiar to their functions, inferior miniſters, alſo, are marked out, for their reſpective offices, according to the meaſure

of the gift of Chriſt. And each individual in the church of God, has his particular ſtation aſſigned him therein, one more, another leſs conſpicuous, but none without his uſe. Much of the beauty of holineſs, therefore, in the character of a chriſtian, lies in finding out, and walking orderly, in his proper place, whether as a miniſter, a deacon, or a member in common with others. To this end we are taught to aſk counſel of God, to wait for, and follow the divine direction. "*Who will go for us?*" ſaid the Lord, before Iſaiah preſumed to put himſelf forward, as a meſſenger commiſſioned from above. But the will of God made known, he replied, "*Here* am *I, ſend me*, on any "errand thou ſeeſt me calculated for." So Paul, enquiring what Chriſt would have him to do, was ordered to enter into Damaſcus, and wait for further inſtructions; which inſtructions afforded, immediately he conferred not with fleſh and blood, but preached the goſpel.—There are, however, certain injunctions, binding on all chriſtians, and indeed ſo obviouſly neceſſary, as to be almoſt intuitive to enlightened minds

minds — to ſet God before their eyes, to profeſs Chriſt's name, to diſtinguiſh themſelves for his cauſe, to maintain a conſcience void of offence, to ſhine as lights in the world, to command their families to keep the way of the Lord, to fill up their ſtations, as parents or children, as huſbands or wives, as friends and neighbours, as men of buſineſs, or profeſſors of the truth, with uprightneſs, ſteadfaſtneſs and good-will, that they may be blameleſs and harmleſs, the children of God without rebuke, in the midſt of a crooked and perverſe nation; nor can there be any genuine experience or exerciſe of religion, unproductive of theſe fruits. What heart, truly acquainted with the terrours of the Lord, will ſtill venture to provoke them? What heart, that has abhorred itſelf for its tranſgreſſions, will return to wallow in the mire? What ſoul, that has known the love of Jeſus, will refuſe to be, to do, of his good pleaſure? Say if you will, that "The Chriſtian is imperfect, "and encompaſſed with many infirmities." — 'Tis admitted; and in proportion to the indulgence of his infirmities, will be the

the deprivation of his comforts. But, if not a ſinleſs, at leaſt a ſettled, a prevalent and practical affection for God and holineſs, is indiviſibly interwoven with real religion. *The love of Chriſt conſtraineth us* [w] (bears us along with it, according to the emphatic original) that *none of us liveth to himſelf, and no man dieth to himſelf*; but, *whether we live, we live unto the Lord, and whether we die, we die unto the Lord*; *whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.* [x] —— Have you faith? Do you make your boaſt of God, and call yourſelf his ſon? Has God diſcovered his love to your ſoul? Are you an expectant of heaven? Let him, that nameth the name of Chriſt, depart from iniquity. *What* doth it *profit, my brethren, though a man ſay he have faith, and have not works? Can* ſuch a dead *faith ſave him?* — No — *Shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will ſhew thee my faith by my works.* [y] By thy works will it be evidenced, that thou art juſtified, or by thy works wilt thou be for ever condemned. This principle

[w] 2 Cor. v. 14. [x] Rom. xiv. 7, 8.
[y] James ii. 14. 18.

ciple, of evangelical and operative piety, is that pure river of water of life, which flows, clear as cryſtal, from the rock Chriſt — which pervades the whole canon of ſcripture — which animates every chriſtian heart — which, under the benign influence of grace, conveys the heaven-born ſoul, to the ocean of everlaſting love, where its bliſs will know no diminution, but be commenſurate with eternity. — O! that our ways were directed, to keep thy ſtatutes! Then ſhall we not be aſhamed, when we have reſpect unto all thy commandments.

Come, Holy Spirit, heav'nly dove,
With all thy quick'ning powers;
Come, ſhed abroad the Saviour's love!
And that ſhall kindle ours.
Amen! —— Amen!

HYMN.

I.

THINE awful glories ſtrike mine eyes;
Thou God of holineſs!
Trembling my ſoul before thee lies,
And doth its ſhame confeſs.

II. "Un-

II.

" Unclean my heart, unclean my tongue,
" My actions all unclean ;
" Unclean the race I dwell among,
" Inſenſible and vain."

III.

Lo ! Juſtice ſtands, with dreadful mien,
Of wrath the pow'r to give ; —
But meek-ey'd Mercy ſteps between,
And bids me, ſinner, live.

IV.

Yes ; —— Hallelujah to thy name !
Mercy is thy delight ;
And Chriſt, the ſacrificed lamb,
Hath merits infinite.

V.

Behold, he pleads before the throne,
His righteouſneſs compleat.
Pardon the follies I have done,
Admit me near thy ſeat.

VI.

O ſend thy Spirit, on my ſoul,
Forgiveneſs bleſt to ſeal !

Thou

Thou mak'ſt the broken ſpirit whole;
To me thy grace reveal.

VII.

My ſteps enlarg'd, in thy commands,
With willing feet, I move:
Who loiters in thy road, or ſtands,
Drawn by the cords of love?

VIII.

For thine appearance, Lord, I wait,
Since thou haſt ſet me free.
Expiring nature's pangs are ſweet,
When they conduct to thee.

THE END.

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